


Oliver
Wendell
Holmes

W. L. SCHROEDER

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES



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Oliver Wendell Holmes

AN APPRECIATION

BY

WILLIAM LAWRENCE SCHROEDER

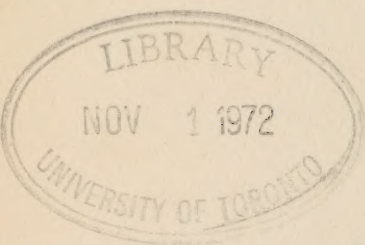
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To my Wife

FOREWORD

IN this little book an attempt has been made to indicate the literary and social values of Oliver Wendell Holmes, in the hope that many will be drawn to a closer appreciation of his services to literature, and of his influence in making for a healthy humanity and a reverential religious faith. That he is worthy of the deep regard of all English-speaking peoples few will deny, for in his writings are qualities of heart and mind which give him a sure place in the affections of all who love kindly humour, learning, and literary grace.

W. L. S.

HALIFAX, *August*, 1909.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1763. *Abiel Holmes born.*
1768. *Dec. 30. Sarah Wendell born.*
1790. *Abiel Holmes married Mary, daughter of President Ezra Stiles.*
1795. *Death of Mary Holmes.*
1800. *Abiel Holmes married Sarah Wendell.*
1809. **August 29. Birth of Oliver Wendell Holmes,**
fourth child of Abiel and Sarah Holmes.
1819. *O. W. Holmes at the Cambridgeport School.*
1824. *Entered Andover Phillips Academy.*
1825. *Entered Harvard College.*
1829. *Graduation, followed by one year's law course.*
1830. *Study of Medicine in Boston.*
1833. *Medical study in Paris.*
1835. *April. Return from Europe.*
1836. *First collection of Holmes's Poems published.*
1836. *Received M.D. degree from Harvard.*
1838. *Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.*
1840. *Resignation of his Professorship, and marriage on June 16 with Miss Amelia Lee Jackson.*
1843. *Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever.*
1847. *Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Harvard Medical School.*

- 1849. *Gave up general medical practice.*
- 1852. *Began his career as a public lecturer which lasted until c. 1858.*
- 1857. *Mechanism of Vital Actions.*
- 1857. Nov. *Beginning of Autocrat papers in the 'Atlantic Monthly.'*
- 1858. *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.*
- 1859. *Professor at the Breakfast Table.*
- 1860. *Currents and Counter-currents in Medical Science.*
- 1861. *Elsie Venner.*
- 1861. *Songs in Many Keys.*
- 1862. *Border Lines of Knowledge in Medical Science.*
- 1863. *Soundings from the Atlantic.*
- 1867. *The Guardian Angel.*
- 1871. *Mechanism in Thought and Morals.*
- 1873. *Poet at the Breakfast Table.*
- 1874. *Songs of Many Seasons.*
- 1875. *Crime and Automatism.*
- 1878. *Memoir of Motley.*
- 1880. *Essay on Jonathan Edwards.*
- 1884. *Memoir of Emerson.*
- 1885. *A Mortal Antipathy.*
- 1886. *April. European trip.*
Litt.D., Cambridge.
LL.D., Edinburgh.
D.C.L., Oxford.
- 1888. *Death of Mrs. O. W. Holmes.*
- 1891. *Over the Teacups.*
- 1894. **October 7. Death of Oliver Wendell Holmes**

INTRODUCTION

LAUGHTER kind genial and melodious is an ebullition of divine grace. For the men who out of their wealth of loving nature enlighten our gloom by life-giving rays of happy humour and tender fun, we are profoundly grateful, in that they help us to know ourselves as privileged souls distinguished from the rest of God's creation by our capacity for mirth and joyousness. Smiles are a sign of our close relationship with God ; for the brutes are incapable of expressing the finer emotions of spiritual appreciation, and the devils, we are told, but grin and tremble. If for nothing else, Oliver Wendell Holmes commands our gratitude for the mirth-provoking wit and humour which irradiates our being and warms us into a sense of high comradeship with worthy thought ; for although here and there he indulges in fun simply for fun's sake, he is not a mere literary mountebank, but a man of serious purpose and lofty ideals who has the courage of an optimistic humour and is out of patience

with those who attempt to stir 'the infinite abysses with a toothpick.' He tells us that 'the ludicrous has its place in the universe; it is not a human invention, but one of the Divine ideas;' and of those who deprecate the gaiety and joyousness of life and whose chill being makes him sneeze and gives him violent cold, he asks the profound question, 'who taught the kitten to play with her tail?' He admits that it is dangerous 'for a literary man to indulge his love for the ridiculous,' since readers are apt to think themselves superior to the man who makes them giggle, but he is willing to take the risk, for in his own nature there is the irrepressible desire to raise the chastened smile and evoke the melodious chuckle. 'I can't be savage with you for wanting to laugh, and I like to make you laugh well enough, when I can.' Yet there are times when the tears start to our eyes, and our hearts are stirred beyond all expectation by the tender handling of the sorrowful side of life, and we realize that Holmes with all his fun had a compassionate regard for the weak things of the earth, and for 'the crippled souls' unto whom had been denied the strength and beauty of common humanity. Occasionally we are lifted to high levels of thought and feeling, as in *Wind-clouds and Star-drifts*, when the deepest passion of the religious nature expresses itself in noble phrase and resonant line, but generally we move

on intermediate planes, where learning and wit and wisdom guide us to the better understanding of the ordinary problems of our everyday existence. It would be a mistake to estimate Holmes by his talent for occasional verse or by his gift of colloquial writing ; he is a manifestation of the scientific temper applied to a wide range of being, and his attractive humour is but a quality of his literary work and not the sum and substance of it. He has a message for us of to-day which rings clear and it may be somewhat thin against the rich bewildering music of modern symbolism and mystic spiritualism, but it is a message not the less needed to give distinction and clarity to our interpretation of life. We shall be the richer in knowing what so genial and sane a writer has to say on some of the eternally abiding problems of human existence, and we shall be cheered and heartened in our quest by the merry laughter which ripples from his pages and by the wit which startles us into a profounder recognition of the unity of life.

It is interesting to reflect on the qualities of national and racial literatures, and to perceive how in subtle spiritual fashion great or notable authors embody in their work the very flavour of the land in which they dwell. The sayings of Jesus hold the spirit and the temper of the East with its climatic sense of the infinite and its disregard of the immediate : the suras of the

Koran are penetrated by the atmosphere of hot, dry places, and our ears catch the echoes of the destroying enchantments of the desert. It is as natural for the children of Spain and Italy to trill love-songs as for the dour native of Scotland to meditate metaphysics: the genial southern climes graciously foster an expression of love and approve a conduct which the forbidding cold of a Scotch mist would consider an outrage on propriety. The ends of human nature may be alike, but methods of attainment vary according to climate.

We cannot fail to observe that the literature of the Celt borrows something from the soft half-lights of glen and ravine and the subtle suggestiveness of mountain and moor. Much of the writing of the modern Irish school has the freshness and delight of green places and the stimulating influence of the west wind blowing from off the tumultuous waste of waters, and there is the sigh of infinite longing and the sense of eternal values in the poetry of W. B. Yeats, and the writings of J. M. Synge. The literature of our own English land is as varied and bewildering as the climate whose vagaries confound and distress the foreigners who honour us with their company. It is possible to push the idea to an absurd extreme, but who can deny that the writings of Crabbe embody the monotony of the Eastern counties, or that the poetry of Wordsworth

enshrines the spirit of high solitudes, or that the work of Tennyson has the cultured aspect of a land brought into subjection to the higher bucolic powers. We are in the line of Holmes's teaching when we emphasize the subtle connexion of land and literature, for throughout his work he gives full value to the compelling power of circumstance. When we turn to the literature of America we find confirmation of our thesis. The bright stimulating atmosphere of that country pervades the writings of her literary men; there is no doubt as to the meaning of what is said, for the sentences run clear as the stream in whose quiet depths gleam the glories of shining pebble and moss-clad rock. Clearness and lucidity of expression characterize American literature, but inasmuch as a stimulating atmosphere generates a sense of the supreme value of the present, and fosters the hope that sufficient to the day will be the strength thereof, so the expression in literature tends to be sporadic and spasmodic; and the consequence is that great sustained efforts are rarely made. In literature proper America has not yet given to the world anything comparable to the monumental work of Milton, Scott, Wordsworth, or Browning. It is true that Whitman has shouted his song across the waters, and that his work is expressive of a great passionate longing for a true catholicism of being, but his message in its formal aspect is scrappy

and disjointed and much of his poetry is too reminiscent of tradesmen's catalogues. Hawthorne would seem to disprove our contention, but classing him as a literary psychologist we save the position. Emerson, Thoreau, Lowell, Whittier, Poe, and with discreet reservations, Longfellow, are men of short pieces; they appeal to us by lyric and essay, by lecture and magazine article; they are content to hold the mind in willing thralldom for an hour or a day, and appear as the very perfection of literary modesty in contrast with the imperious demand made on the reader by Dante, Goethe, or Swinburne. The writings of Washington Irving, William Winter, and John Burroughs, in their formal brevity, clearness of meaning, and piquancy of phrase, give force to the idea that the literature of a country is penetrated by atmospheric and climatic qualities. The work of Oliver Wendell Holmes is a signal illustration of the thought: bright, vivacious, stimulating, and readily intelligible, it appeals at once to mind and soul, and justifies the praise of his friend, Thomas G. Appleton, who, in his book *A Sheaf of Papers*, wrote this dedication:—'To Oliver Wendell Holmes, who has put the electricity of our climate into words, and been to so many a physician to the mind as well as the body.' The defect of the oversea's atmospheric quality is noted by Holmes himself: 'our American atmosphere is vocal with the

flippant loquacity of half knowledge. We must accept whatever good can be got out of it, and keep it under as we do sorrel and mullein and witchgrass, by enriching the soil, and sowing good seed in plenty ; by good teaching and good books, rather than by wasting our time in talking against it. Half knowledge dreads nothing but whole knowledge.' That Holmes has enriched the soil and sown good seed no one can deny. His services to American literature were rendered in a spirit of passionate regard for country and people, and he exulted in the fame which his literary contemporaries secured for America. In common with the rest of the New England school, he had a deep abiding love for his native land, and especially for that bit of it in the centre of which stood the Boston State-house. He spoke of himself as an 'inveterately rooted American of the Bostonian variety,' and thought of his city as the 'brain' of the New World, as the 'thinking centre of the continent, and therefore of the planet,' for the superlative praise of 'the Sculpin' is but the artistically exaggerated sentiment of Holmes himself.

I tell you Boston has opened, and kept open, more turn-pikes that lead straight to free thought and free speech and free deeds than any other city of live men or dead men. . . . I would not take all the glory of all the greatest cities in the world for my birthright in the soil of little Boston.

Times there were when he sighed for the life

of the greater world, but the conservative instinct was strong within him, and he faithfully maintained his devotion to the city of his sojourn, to the University which fostered his powers, and to the class of '29 wherein he realized intensely the joyousness of comradeship. His health in some measure conditioned his choice of city-life, but like Lamb, he naturally loved 'the sweet security of streets,' and pleaded for a better recognition of the hygienic value of well-paved, well-drained thoroughfares. 'A first-rate city house is a regular *sanatorium*.' Whatever the reason of his loyalty to Boston, we are safe in regarding the literary work of Holmes as an embodiment of the spirit which pervaded Bostonian culture and the larger life of educated New England.

It is an evidence of Holmes's essentially artistic nature, that he was able to discern the picturesque characteristics of his fellow-countrymen, and to set these forth in a way at once attractive and forceful and convincing. If we are right in thinking of literature as embodying, among other things, national and climatic qualities, we cannot be wrong in regarding the work of Oliver Wendell Holmes as essentially American in temper and flavour; and therefore distinctive and of value as marking a special phase of literary activity wherein English traditions move to the impulses of characteristically new spirit.

PERSONALITY

THE best commentary on the writings of such an author as Holmes is the life of the man ; for his work is essentially individual and intimate. Much of his writing is autobiography pure and simple ; his characters serve but to emphasize elements of thought and experience and doctrine which have entered into his life and fashioned his spiritual existence. He quotes approvingly the saying of Sir Thomas Browne, 'every man truly lives, so long as he acts his nature, or some way makes good the faculties of himself,' and in justice we must admit that Holmes exemplified the sentiment. In the epilogue to the Breakfast Table Series, the acknowledgment is made :—

What have I rescued from the shelf ?
A Boswell, writing out himself !
For though he changes dress and name,
The man beneath is still the same,
Laughing or sad, by fits and starts,
One actor in a dozen parts,
And whatsoe'er the mask may be,
The voice assures us, *This is he.*

It will be well worth our while to understand somewhat the personality of the man whose graciousness and charm commanded the regard of all and the warm affection of not a few. He had some idea of his standing in the world of men and letters, and with him there was a natural desire to be remembered. 'It is a pleasant thought enough that the name by which we have been called shall be familiar on the lips of those who come after us, and the thoughts that wrought themselves out in our intelligence, the emotions that trembled through our frames, shall live themselves over again in the minds and hearts of others.' He understood the disadvantages of literary immortality: 'to become a classic and share the life of a language is to be ever open to criticisms, to comparisons, to the caprices of suggestive generations,' but he was not unwilling to accept the pleasures and the pains involved in the prospect of an assured position in the realm of literature. 'There are times when the thought of becoming utterly nothing to the world we knew so well and loved so much is painful and oppressive.'

Such an annihilation is impossible in the case of one who has given us the tenderly pathetic figure of 'Little Boston,' who has touched both heart and mind in the sweet-sounding melody of *The Last Leaf* and *The Chambered Nautilus*, and who, in the story of *Iris*, has wrought us to

greater sympathy with all that is most radiant and beautiful in the sacrifice of service. We need not fear the judgment of the generations, for Holmes's faults are all on the surface; the heart of him is sound whatever the unfriendly critic may say of his vanity and snobbishness.

If for a time we seem to dwell on aspects of his work and nature which modify our thought of his value to the world, it is only that we finally may have a true sense of his worth, for his life and writings are instinct with high thought and noble feeling, and the purity of his purpose is beyond all praise.

Oliver Wendell Holmes had the advantage of a worthy ancestry. Men of commercial integrity, of civic virtue, and of professional power, women of sterling quality and of fine perceptions, lent to his nature intellectual and spiritual elements which in combination gave tone to his being and marked him with the brand of a natural aristocracy. If we are of an inquisitive nature we may find some satisfaction in tracing the practical business capacity of Dr. Holmes to the Dutch blood which flowed from the Wendells through his mother's veins. On the same side we have the Olivers, people of taste and affluence, who might be held responsible for the superiority of manner which characterized Holmes, and for the tendency to medicine which fulfilled itself worthily in a life devoted to the finer interests

of medical science. On his father's side too there were doctors of both sexes: the great-grandmother of Oliver had a reputation as nurse and midwife which was one of the cherished possessions of the family. We read of her that during the great snow-storm of 1717, she was summoned to attend a sick woman who lived miles away. The houses were half buried in snow, but 'Grandmother Edmunds' as she was called, got out of the bedroom window, obtained the assistance of two men, and by the help of a long pole whose ends rested on the shoulders of the men and thereby allowed her to cling to the middle, the brave woman accomplished the journey and fulfilled her mission. Something of her sturdy daring nature appears in the make-up of her great-grandchild. Abiel Holmes, the father of the poet, was a man of scholarly tastes and attainments, who to divinity added antiquarian and historical lore; from him Oliver derived his love of books, and, perhaps, a turn for versification.

In *The Poet at the Breakfast Table* we read, 'People are touchy about social distinctions, which no doubt are often invidious and quite arbitrary and accidental, but which it is impossible to avoid recognizing as facts of natural history;' and in *The Professor* there is the same emphasis on the reality and inevitableness of social stratification. Now Holmes had the courage of his own position as one of the 'Brahmin

caste ;' if he had been born in other days and under other skies he would probably have been a fervent upholder of the 'Divine Right of Kings.' He accepted the amenities of his lot with becoming composure, and having no particular quarrel with an environment and heritage which meant position, good-breeding, education, and power, he remained loyal to his class and frankly championed its worth. So with him, 'good-breeding is *Surface Christianity*,' and a sign of the approbation of the gods. In the concluding chapter of *Elsie Venner*, Mr. Bernard Langdon, a medical neophyte, receives advice which not ungenerously represents one phase of Holmes's social gospel.

When a fellow like you chooses his beat, he must look ahead a little. Take care of all the poor that apply to you, but leave the half-pay classes to a different style of doctor—the people who spend one half their time in taking care of their patients, and the other half in squeezing out their money. Go for the swell-fronts and south-exposure houses ; the folks inside are just as good as other people, and the pleasantest, on the whole, to take care of. They must have somebody, and they like a gentleman best. Don't throw yourself away. You have a good presence and pleasing manners. You wear white linen by inherited instinct. You can pronounce the word *view*. You have all the elements of success ; go and take it. Be polite and generous, but don't undervalue yourself. You will be useful, at any rate ; you may just as well be happy, while you are about it. The highest social class furnishes incomparably the best patients, taking them by and large. Besides, when they won't get well and bore

you to death, you can send 'em off to travel. Mind me now, and take the tops of your sparrow-grass. Somebody must have 'em—why shouldn't you?

In playing Polonius to his Laertes, Holmes is simply articulating those common-sense principles of conduct which even the most pious of saints cannot afford to neglect; but beyond this there is the questionable assumption that 'the sunny street that holds the sifted few' is a necessary condition of social solidarity, and that self-interest, more or less enlightened, may be served best by the concern of a class with its own internal affairs. The gracious geniality of Holmes softens the somewhat slighting references to 'quondam rustics' whose pronunciation occasionally lapses from the propriety of Boston culture. When a gentleman born and bred tells us, with a smile of familiarity and a sweet condescension, that we belong to the 'lower cla-a-sses,' we may be conscious of the compliment implied in the mere communication, but at the same time the retort will rise to our lips, 'It is not for you to say so.' It may be, as Holmes found when he visited England in his later days, that 'it is really easier to feel at home with the highest people in the land than with the awkward commoner who was knighted yesterday,' but such ease of social relationship is no guarantee of the righteousness upon which alone the best society is based, and if 'exclusiveness has its conveniences,' it also

has its aspects of snobbishness and paltry pride. Holmes's egotism was of a very attractive order, but sometimes he allows his sense of superiority to express itself in irritating phrase and unnecessary allusion, which we forgive for the sake of so much that is really generous and gracious in his life and writings. It may be that conceit is 'to human character what salt is to the ocean: it keeps it sweet, and renders it enduring,' but there may be a superabundance which destroys life and turns our lake of living waters to a veritable Dead Sea of stagnation and rejection. And yet we are bound to smile at the delightfully naïve way in which Holmes states his preferences and flourishes his conceits; his humour saves him from condemnation, even if on the total count—and this we doubt—he deserves it.

I care not much for gold or land;—
 Give me a mortgage here and there,—
 Some good bank-stock, some note of hand,
 Or trifling railroad share,—
 I only ask that Fortune send
 A *little* more than I shall spend.

Of pictures, I should like to own
 Titians and Raphaels three or four,—
 I love so much their style and tone,—
 One Turner, and no more,
 (A landscape,—foreground golden dirt,—
 The sunshine painted with a squirt.)

Of books but few,—some fifty score
For daily use, and bound for wear ;
The rest upon an upper floor ;—
Some *little* luxury *there*
Of red morocco's gilded gleam,
And vellum rich as country cream.

Thus humble let me live and die,
Nor long for Midas' golden touch ;
If Heaven more generous gifts deny,
I shall not miss them *much*,—
Too grateful for the blessing lent
Of simple tastes and mind content !

Primarily Holmes is an egotist. Much of the charm and value of his work lies in the intense intimacy of his confessions and imaginings. When at the close of *The Autocrat* he writes, 'I hope you all love me none the less for anything I have told you,' he brings us straightway into the inner circle of his communion, and commands our allegiance as friends. Holmes's capacity for friendship and his almost universal kindness are among the best evidences of a genuine aristocracy of character. He won the regard of the finest minds in New England, and brought into subjection to his literary charm an innumerable host of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. Writing, in 1860, to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, he said, 'I have, in common with yourself, a desire to leave the world a little more human than if I had not lived ; for a true humanity is, I believe,

our nearest approach to Divinity, while we work out our atmospheric apprenticeship on the surface of this second-class planet.' Probably the secret of his power lay in this, that his was essentially a religious personality. With all his heart he desired the best that life could give in the way of moral force and spiritual perception. Under all his fun there was a profound respect for the common manifestations of the religious spirit. Speaking of church-going, he wrote, 'There is a little plant called *Reverence* in the corner of my Soul's garden, which I love to have watered about once a week.' In the letter from 'the Lady' given in *The Poet*—a letter which seems to give the inmost feeling of Holmes himself—we have a very noble expression of human needs.

Now I want to remind you that religion is not a matter of intellectual luxury to those of us who are interested in it, but something very different. It is our life, and more than our life; for that is measured by pulse-beats, but our religious consciousness partakes of the Infinite, towards which it is constantly yearning. It is very possible that a hundred or five hundred years from now the *forms* of religious belief may be so altered that we should hardly know them. But the sense of dependence on Divine influence, and the need of communion with the unseen and eternal, will be then just what they are now. . . . We all want religion sooner or later. I am afraid there are some who have no natural turn for it, as there are persons without an ear for music . . . but sorrow and misery bring even these to know what it means, in a great many instances. . . . I am jealous, yes, I own I

am jealous of any word, spoken or written, that would tend to impair that birthright of reverence which becomes for so many in after years the basis of a deeper religious sentiment.

During his visit to England in 1886, Holmes was struck by the contrast afforded in the reverential behaviour of the English people, to the somewhat vulgar independence and familiarity of his own countrymen. To 'the Dictator' as to 'the Professor,' 'companionship in worship, and sitting quiet for an hour while a trained speaker, presumably somewhat better than we are, stirs up our spiritual nature,' was reason enough for regular attendance at public worship; but we suspect a deeper reason in the longing to realize the subtle affinities of soul with soul and to prove the divinity of human nature in a holy communion with the spirit of God. 'A true man's allegiance is given to that which is highest in his own nature . . . Our reverence is good for nothing if it does not begin with self-respect.'

Holmes, like the majority of Unitarians, was not given to much talk about his soul: but permeating every fibre of his being was that instinctive regard for God which found, oddly enough, some expression in the genial egotism which saturated his writings, and in the propriety which hindered in a measure his co-operation with the forward social reform movements of his day, but which manifested itself more truly

in his passion for truth and in his devotion to the methods of science and to the chastening of theological dogma. The Rev. Abiel Holmes had hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps as a minister of the gospel. In one sense the hope was fulfilled, for Oliver Wendell Holmes's writings have a strain of real preaching in them, but the gospel is one of joyous freedom and happy humour, and far removed from the dreary Calvinism which made young Oliver resolve to be anything but a parson. To some of the shining lights of the Orthodox party he had as a child a profound aversion. He tells us of one who 'had a twist in his mouth that knocked a benediction out of shape,' and who 'proved afterwards to have a twist in his morals of a still more formidable character.' The Rev. Joseph Bellamy Stoker, whose contemptible hypocrisy in *The Guardian Angel* makes us wonder whether the paint has not been laid on too thick, is, we are assured, 'only a softened copy of too many originals' to whom Holmes as boy and man had respectfully to listen, while they dealt with 'the bulk of their fellow-creatures, after the manner of their sect.' Holmes tells us that he might have become a minister himself if a certain 'clergyman had not looked and talked so like an undertaker.' We are profoundly grateful for the funereal aspect which by a kindly Providence saved Holmes for brighter things. There is a

touch of pathos in that passage in *The Professor* which deals with the choosing of a clergyman: 'other things being equal, prefer the one of a wholesome and cheerful habit of mind and body. If you can get along with people who carry a certificate in their faces that their goodness is so great as to make them very miserable, your children cannot. And whatever offends one of these little ones, cannot be right in the eyes of him who loved them so well.' In his essay on *The Pulpit and the Pew* Holmes expresses his highest regard for the ministry of religion and the priesthood of character and ability. His large conception of the variety of ministerial function is a splendid tribute to the faith into which he grew. In *The Poet* he speaks of ministers as 'on the whole the most efficient civilizing class, working downwards from knowledge to ignorance, that is—now and then upwards, also—that we have.' They are 'good talkers, only the struggle between nature and grace makes some of 'em a little awkward occasionally.'

On the whole we are not sorry that the boy with a weakness for guns and pistols and cigars and 'with tendencies in the way of flageolets and flutes' was allowed to choose freely his own career. For a time he dallied with law, but medicine claimed him and sent him abroad to Paris, where with diligence and success he prepared himself for his professional career. His

interest in science was of early appearance. In 1828 he writes to Phineas Barnes : ' I have paid considerable attention to Chemistry and Mineralogy, and think them both very interesting studies ; ' but this smacks of the conceit of youth. Of more value is his statement of the principles learnt in Paris ; ' not to take authority when I can have facts ; not to guess when I can know ; not to think a man must take physic because he is sick : ' for the insistence on the value of facts, the obligation to get into close touch with reality, and the disregard for mere tradition as such, characterize the life and work of Oliver Wendell Holmes. In his address on *Currents and Counter-Currents in Medical Science*, he affirmed that ' Nature, in medical language, as opposed to Art, means trust in the reactions of the living system against ordinary normal impressions,' which involves a profound belief in the righteousness of universal law, and the essential health of the physical world. In his attack on medical superstitions, the sheer common sense of Holmes appeals forcibly to our minds. He had a splendid regard for the profession which undertook the cure, or care, of bodies, and believed strongly in the healing influence of fit personality. Only men of healthy temperament should be doctors, for in medicine so much depended on the relations established between physician and patient. Holmes taught the doctrine of the whole expres-

sion of a man in his work, believing that only thereby could be success. Throughout *The Guardian Angel* there runs a high conception of the morality and worth of the medical profession.

In an address to his students he said :—

Medicine is the most difficult of sciences and the most laborious of arts. It will task all your powers of body and mind if you are faithful to it. Do not dabble in the muddy sewer of politics, nor linger by the enchanted streams of literature, nor dig in far-off fields for the hidden waters of alien sciences. The great practitioners are generally those who concentrate all their powers on their business.

He was speaking out of the full consciousness of his failure as a practitioner. What the reasons of that failure were is hard to say. Dr. W. E. Channing tells us that on one occasion he took Holmes to visit an invalid lady in one of the suburbs of Boston. Holmes, like De Quincey, was spare and of boyish form. Whether the eyesight of the good lady was in fault or not, the fact is on record that she rose in bed, and said petulantly, ‘Dr. Channing, why do you bring that little boy in here? Take him away! this is no place for boys.’ We are not surprised to learn that Dr. Holmes retired in wrathful and indignant mood. If that kind of reception was in any sense general, it is no wonder that Holmes sought solace in literary joys, despite the outrage on the tradition that a doctor should stick to his physic. Probably the truth is that

he was really more fitted to teach others than to practise himself. As Professor, first in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, and later in Harvard University, he honourably fulfilled the ideal which in the early Parisian days inspired him to strenuous efforts to make himself master of his craft. As Parkman Professor of Anatomy he instructed and entertained the callow medical youth of his day, lecturing at an hour when most of the students were in a state of mental and physical exhaustion. Dr. Cheever, who for eight years was his demonstrator and assistant, writes :—

As a lecturer he was accurate, punctual, precise, unvarying in patience over detail, and though not an original anatomist in the sense of a discoverer, yet a most exact descriptive lecturer ; while the wealth of illustration, comparison, and simile he used was unequalled. Hence his charm ; you received information, and you were amused at the same time. He was always simple and rudimentary in his instruction. His flights of fancy never shot over his hearers' heads. 'Iteration and reiteration' was his favourite motto in teaching. 'These, gentlemen,' he said on one occasion, pointing out the lower portion of the pelvic bones, 'are the tuberosities of the ischia, on which man was designed to sit and survey the works of Creation.' But if witty, he could also be serious and pathetic ; and he possessed the high power of holding and controlling his rough auditors.

This phase of his personality which embodied love of truth, loyalty to duty, and a profound regard for one of the noblest of professions, can

by no means be neglected by the student of his writings: for in the light of his Professorial charge, much of his literary work receives new and emphasized meaning. At the conclusion of the essay on *Mechanism in Thought and Morals* Holmes writes, 'True faith and true philosophy ought to be one.' We may add that this significant unity was demonstrated in the daily work of the Parkman Professor of Anatomy.

Of striking value to medicine was the essay on *The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever*, which was read in 1842 before the Boston Society for Medical Improvement. It met with considerable criticism at the hands of Professor Hodge and Dr. Meigs, but Holmes had the courage of facts and stuck bravely to his condemnation of prevalent medical practice. The essay is penetrated with humane passion; here and there are splendidly eloquent passages which arouse the thought whether Dr. Holmes would not have been a supremely successful special pleader, if he had but entered the service of the law. Dr. William Osler tells us that this essay gave Holmes a sound medical reputation.

Among noteworthy characteristics we may mention the Autocrat's love of home. For a certain period of his life, Holmes was a lyceum lecturer; he tells us of his audiences with the due proportion of dull 'negative faces with vacuous eyes and stony lineaments,' and adds,

‘Family men get dreadfully home-sick. In the remote and bleak village the heart returns to the red blaze of the logs in one’s fire-place at home. . . . No, the world has a million roosts for a man, but only one nest.’

His love of books amounted to a passion. He speaks of himself as ‘a man who staggered against books as a baby, and will totter against them if he lives to decrepitude.’ In *The Poet* there is splendid advice to the man who would form a library on sound principles of learning, but it would be risky for some of us to proceed on the lines set down by ‘the Master,’—‘When Providence throws a good book in my way, I bow to its decree and purchase it as an act of piety, if it is reasonably or unreasonably cheap,’—for there is likely to be family disagreement as to the real meaning of ‘reasonably cheap.’ But Holmes was not a mere book-burrower. In *The Autocrat* he sets out his preference in balanced measure.

I like books,—I was born and bred among them, and have the easy feeling, when I get into their presence, that a stable-boy has among horses. I don’t think I undervalue them either as companions or instructors. But I can’t help remembering that the world’s great men have not commonly been great scholars, nor its great scholars great men. . . . There are times in which every active mind feels itself above any and all human books.

And again, ‘I always believed in life rather than in books.’

Holmes's love of sport is well known. It is no vain challenge which 'the Professor' makes to 'the Autocrat.' 'I will box with you, row with you, walk with you, ride with you, swim with you, or sit at table with you, for fifty dollars a side.' In all these things the Doctor at appropriate periods excelled. He liked to see a decent bit of horse-flesh, and to experience the excitement of the turf. His analysis of exercise ought to be the Foreword in every 'Physical Health Instructor.' His account of the early mornings on the river Charles, when in lightly built outrigger he traversed the gleaming waters, makes us long for the glory and the freedom of the sea. His report of a gentlemen's sparring exhibition, reminds us of the immortal 'Fight' which Hazlitt described.

Here is a delicate young man now, with an intellectual countenance, a slight figure, a subpallid complexion, a most unassuming deportment, a mild adolescent in fact, that any Hiram or Jonathan from between the plough-tails would of course expect to handle with perfect ease. Oh, he is taking off his gold-bowed spectacles! Ah, he is divesting himself of his cravat! Why, he is stripping off his coat! Well, here he is, sure enough, in a tight silk shirt, and with two things that look like batter puddings in the place of his fists. Now see that other fellow with another pair of batter puddings,—the big one with the broad shoulders; he will certainly knock the little man's head off, if he strikes him. Feinting, dodging, stopping, hitting, countering,—little man's head not off yet. You might as well try to jump upon your own shadow as to hit the little man's intellectual features.

He needn't have taken off the gold-bowed spectacles at all. Quick, cautious, shifty, nimble, cool, he catches all the fierce lunges or gets out of their reach, till his turn comes, and then, whack goes one of the batter puddings against the big one's ribs and bang goes the other into the big one's face, and, staggering, shuffling, slipping, tripping, collapsing, sprawling, down goes the big one in a miscellaneous bundle.

If, he wickedly adds, the manly art of self-defence could only be introduced among the clergy, 'I am satisfied that we should have better sermons and an infinitely less quarrelsome church militant.' But, unfortunately, ecclesiastical conflicts are not of so straight and direct an order.

It is impossible to quarrel with a man whose tastes are so healthy, and whose personality is so attractive. Holmes never disguises his love of the good things of life : he disdains to apologize for his preferences, for 'apology is only egotism wrong side out ;' he fulfils his own definition of a crank as 'one who does his own thinking ;' and exemplifies his own dictum that 'it's faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth looking at.'

ARTISTRY

FEW will deny that craftsmanship involves elements of morality which are in one sense independent of the nature of the work as a whole. The thing which in its total appeal may cause us to recoil as from insidious evil, may in its specific aspect as mere artistry compel our admiration of its virtue and convince us of the essentially moral element contained in the formal presentation of the artistic idea. For all artistry involves choice, save in the case of that genius which is allied to madness and which is but an instance of divine favour and human irresponsibility. In this latter case the judgment is passed on the whole, and the craftsman is regarded as the medium⁷ of powers and purposes which are beyond the critical appraisement of mere human beings. All transcendently great art exemplifies in some degree this character of possession and spiritual influence, and implies a perfected morality of

technique, but inasmuch as art is representative of experience, so in its character as revelation it places upon us the burden of interpretation and of the discovery of those spiritual laws which necessarily condition its manifestation.

Finally we are driven to the faith that all artistry implies moral and spiritual virtue independent of the medium or the substance in which or upon which it works. For the ordinary purposes of life and mind we are content to deal with art as a whole, finding matter for criticism in the morality concerned in the choice of subject-matter, and in the technical power by which the implied purpose of the artist is consummated. In the light of this idea all literary art has moral and spiritual values which receive their meaning in the knowledge of the personality of the artist as such. But the ultimate value for the world lies in the nature of the revelation and spiritual power which in the disdain of human expectations pours itself through the artistic instrument of its choice.

Regarding Holmes's literary work as a whole, it is impossible to give it any high place among the great writings of the world. It is clever and full of learning, it is varied in expression and possessed of charm, it ranges through the whole gamut of the emotions, it is clear and convincing and exhibits qualities of sincerity and veracity, it is gracious and tender and quaintly humorous,

but with all its virtue it lacks great passion, ideality, and spiritual genius.

From an article by Wyatt Eaton, the portrait painter, we learn that Whittier 'was strong in his praises of all his contemporaries, but particularly of Holmes. "Why," he would say, "Holmes is, in many respects, the greatest of us all."' Surely this came out of sheer friendliness, for in his review of Holmes's Poems, Whittier admitted that Holmes wrote 'simply for the amusement of himself and his readers.' Perhaps the qualifying phrase 'in many respects' had reference to Holmes's command of style and to his equipment as a metrist; for we may admit that so far as literary technique goes, Holmes is in the front rank of the New England writers. But the possession of great technical power cannot atone for the almost entire absence of ideal creative purpose.

Holmes had little suspicion of his limitations as a poet; throughout his writings there is the assumption of being in the fellowship of creative souls. In his analysis of talent and genius, in *The Professor*, he stresses as is right the voluntary nature of talent and its distinctly human character, but speaking of genius he says it 'is much more like those instincts which govern the admirable movements of the lower creatures, and therefore seems to have something of the lower or animal character.' Surely genius is the

very antithesis of instinct, for the latter is the perfected mechanical response to environment, while the former is the manifestation of a power which moulds the world to its will and breaks the brutal tyranny of circumstance. On Holmes's own showing, he is 'but a talented man,' despite his intellectual appreciation of the soul and method of poetry. In his review of *Exotics*, a book of poetical translations by Dr. James Freeman Clarke and his daughter, Dr. Holmes gives a succinct description of the process of poetic composition. The will is first exercised to banish obtrusive impressions. The inner nature working by its own laws manifests itself in frenzy of thought and feeling. Granted technical qualifications 'every possibility of rhythm or rhyme offers itself actually or potentially to the clairvoyant perception simultaneously with the thought it is to embody. Thus poetical composition is the most intense, the most exciting, and therefore the most exhausting of mental exercises. It is exciting because its mental states are a series of revelations and surprises; intense on account of the double strain upon the attention.' In more whimsical fashion Holmes, in a letter to Moses Sweetser, gives us the same idea. 'To write a lyric is like having a fit, you can't have one when you wish you could, and you can't help having it when it comes itself.'

Now it is just this element of inevitability which

we miss in his prose writings, and in the great majority of his poems. *Old Ironsides* has the right touch, the memorial tribute to Dr. Samuel G. Howe has the element of inspiration, the rollicking fun and tender pathos of *The Boys* gives us the sense of poetic compulsion, the *One-Hoss Shay* shows traces of the same quality, *The Chambered Nautilus* strikes through the imagination straight to the heart, *Wind-clouds and Star-drifts* generates, yet in unequal measure, the feeling of sheer inevitability; but much of his poetry presents little reason why it should be than otherwise, save in its power to soften the edge of a hard existence, and to chequer our lot with the sunshine of smiles. In *Mechanism in Thought and Morals* Holmes writes, 'the mental attitude of the poet while writing . . . is that of the "nun breathless with adoration." Mental stillness is the first condition of the listening state.' Then as we learn in *The Autocrat*, unto the poet is granted the priceless gift of a soul. 'It comes to him a thought, tangled in the meshes of a few sweet words,—words that have loved each other from the cradle of the language, but have never been wedded until now.' The symbolic nature of poetry, and its power of articulating for us the bewildering experiences of life, is suggested by the *Autocrat*. 'A genuine poem is capable of absorbing an indefinite amount of the essence of our own humanity—its tenderness, its heroism,

its regrets, its aspirations, so as to be gradually stained through with a divine secondary colour derived from ourselves.'

The task of criticism is a thankless one. The Professor tells us that critics are made out of the 'chips' left from the manufacture of authors, but the imputation that authors are a wooden lot ill consorts with Holmes's idea of the dignity of literature, and destroys the sting that otherwise might be left to rankle in our critical side. The truth is that Holmes in poetic achievement fell far short of the poetic ideal which to none other more clearly showed itself. Perhaps it was as he suggested that there was 'no sufficient flavour of humanity in the soil' out of which he grew, but in his autobiographical notes we are led to think that he was the exception that tested the dictum, for he admits that his birthplace provided 'enough to kindle the fancy and the imagination of a child of poetic tendencies.' His conception of poetry as 'that "inspiration of the Almighty which giveth understanding" to all his thinking creatures, and sends his spiritual messengers to them with thoughts, as he sent the ravens with food to Elijah in the wilderness,' sufficiently accounts for one phase of poetry in its appeal to the mind, but does not cover the wonder and glory of the subtle emotional element in all great poetry, by which we are wrought into ineffable communion with the spirit of the

universe and made to forget the things of time and sense in our rapt enjoyment of eternal beauty. By precept if not by example Holmes guides us in our thoughts of poetic culture. The words of tender sympathy for the 'sweet albino-poets' like Henry Kirke White, for the poets 'by excess of sensibility' like Keats, stimulate us to ask whether Holmes was not a poet by excess of intellectual humour. He was gay, clever, vivacious, witty and sentimental. He recognized that 'reason may be the lever, but sentiment gives you the fulcrum and the place to stand on if you want to move the world.' He was keenly interested in the things of mind; his scientific temper made for lucid exposition and a clear intelligible literary style. He was profoundly concerned with his own gifts and development; in no disagreeable way but quite definitely he stood for individualism, and recognized that the American constitution was 'nothing but a coarse outside machinery to secure the freedom of individual thought.' His wit and humour sprang out of a ready intellectual apprehension of the unity of divergent things, and in his poetry this power finds abounding expression.

If like Rogers he had a mild assurance and a fervent hope of poetic immortality, we will not dispute his right, but we will recall his own division of poets into those of the 'great sun-kindled, constructive imaginations' and those

'who have a certain kind of moonlight-genius given them to compensate for their imperfection of nature,' and remembering that his poetic work has little to offer us in the way of great 'constructive' imagination, we will apply his own judgment and leave readers to make their own deductions. 'I don't think there are many poets in the sense of creators; but of those sensitive natures which reflect themselves naturally in soft and melodious words, pleading for sympathy with their joys and sorrows, every literature is full. Nature carves with her own hands the brain which holds the creative imagination, but she casts the over-sensitive creatures in scores from the same mould.'

Among Holmes's positive poetic qualities is a metrical propriety which invariably convinces. He had a delicate sense of literary fitness, which perhaps was due to his love of eighteenth century classics. As a child he revelled in Pope's Homer; Goldsmith, Moore, and Hood were later among his favourites. The kind of verse which Whitman fashioned outraged Holmes's sense of literary dignity. He liked to say exactly what he meant in a bright melodic way; he never propounded riddles nor lost himself in misty mysticism; he indulged in pure and often noble sentiment, and was invariably sweet and clean in his choice of subject. Occasionally, like the great big boy he was—Leslie Stephen referring to the absence

of bitterness in his work said 'this was perhaps because he never grew to manhood'—he was naughty and perverse, and let his love of fun run away with him, but at no time did he forget to behave as a gentleman. He excels as a lyrist. Some of his songs go with a merry swing that deadens our sense of their substance. A couple of his hymns are the very perfection of sacred lyric. As an occasional verse maker he is well in the running with Hood and Praed and Calverley, but we doubt whether his reputation will go beyond that of the author of *Good-night to the season* and *Hobbledehoys*. Holmes makes a plea for a better recognition of this kind of verse. 'Because a poem is an "occasional" one, it does not follow that it has not taken as much time and skill as if it had been written without immediate, accidental, temporary motive . . . it is safe to say that many a trifling performance has had more good honest work put into it than the minister's sermon of that week had cost him.' Assuredly, but in both cases it is the inspiration and not the labour which gives the value.

We are grateful to the poet for many an hour of quiet, happy delight. The joyousness of his verse has lightened our hearts of care, and sent us with freshened purpose to our conflict with life. The fun and frolic which riot on almost every page banish worry and give tone

to our system. When Holmes tries to be strictly proper, as in the metrical essay on Poetry, read before the *Phi Beta Kappa* Society in 1836, he is simply dull and pedantic, and we long to read him his own verses, *Nux Postcænatica* or *Evening, by a Tailor*. But when his heart is touched with tender thought, we are ready to hear and to sympathize and to be led away by the sweet music of his utterance. We turn to *Homesick in Heaven*, which W. D. Howells thought 'one of the most important, the most profoundly pathetic in the language,' and 'one of the finest and greatest that Dr. Holmes ever wrote,' and to *The Last Leaf* with its masterly combination of humour and pathos, and at once we are brought in subjection to his poetic charm, and stifle all questionings as to his ultimate place in the great realm of classical literature. That he wrote a great deal of very ordinary stuff—think of the poems to order and on request—all will admit, but that he had the gift of song and tuneful rhythm no one dare deny. When on occasions he lets his conceit overbalance his judgment of taste, as in the Moore-like stanzas where he warbles—

We will part before Summer has opened her wing,
And the bosom of June swells the bodice of Spring :

we recognize therein the defect of his quality of witty humour.

Something has been said as to the satirical quality of his nature. Leslie Stephen wrote, 'But with all his power of ridicule, Holmes had not a touch of the satirist about him.' If by satire is meant venomous invective, this is true; but Holmes is not devoid of the power to sting. He dedicated the poem *The Sweet Little Man*, written during the War, to the 'stay-at-home rangers.' Somebody must have felt hurt.

You with the terrible warlike mustaches,
Fit for a colonel or chief of a clan,
You with the waist made for sword-belts and sashes,
Where are your shoulder-straps, sweet little man?

Bring him the buttonless garment of woman!
Cover his face lest it freckle and tan;
Muster the Apron-strings Guards on the Common,
That is the corps for the sweet little man!

Give him for escort a file of young misses,
Each of them armed with a deadly rattan;
They shall defend him from laughter and kisses,
Aimed by low boys at the sweet little man.

Now then, nine cheers for the Stay-at-home Ranger!
Blow the great fish-horn and beat the big pan!
First in the field that is farthest from danger,
Take your white-feather plume, sweet little man!

Probably Holmes is known more generally as a prose writer rather than poet. Folks read the Breakfast Table Series and are content with the verse therein found. It is fortunate that the

poetry so included is among the best he produced. In common with the majority of front-rank American writers, Holmes possesses a clear attractive prose style which makes no great demand on the attention of the reader. The later books, *Our Hundred Days in Europe* and *Over the Teacups*, have little distinction of style to recommend them. They are pleasant reading, touched a little with the virtues of senility. But the earlier books, *The Autocrat* and *The Professor*, are virile and fascinating, and we cannot but praise the discernment of Lowell who insisted on Holmes's inclusion on the staff of 'The Atlantic Monthly,' and thereby forced the production of papers which are a continual delight to the lover of good things. Even *The Poet*, which some one called 'an intolerably dull book,' has a charm and beauty of its own independent of the stimulating thought embedded in every number, and of the creation of the Scarabee. It is likely that a final judgment will regard the poetry as of prime consideration, for much of Holmes's ordinary prose is but excellent conversation dashed with meditation and reminiscence. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps said that 'Dr. Holmes was decidedly the most brilliant converser' whom she had ever met. Holmes admitted that he had a tendency to 'linguacity,' but he was well aware of the responsibility thereby entailed. 'Remember,' he said, 'that talking is one of the fine arts—the

noblest, the most important, and the most difficult,—and that its fluent harmonies may be spoiled by the intrusion of a single harsh note,’ and so he pleaded for conversation which was suggestive rather than argumentative. Besides, talking allows approximations to truth, and enables the thinker to shape his thoughts. It ‘is like playing at a mark with the pipe of an engine ; if it is within reach, and you have time enough, you can’t help hitting it.’ All this makes for genial comradeship and friendly intercourse. We feel the gentle flattery of the method. But we cannot be blind to the dangers of triviality, inconsequential thinking and capriciousness which such a method invites. We know that with Dr. Holmes literary composition was a serious and oftentimes burdensome affair, and that he regarded his work for ‘The Atlantic Monthly’ as altogether worthy of his best effort. Yet the Breakfast Table Series is not unlike the curate’s egg, good in parts : it is only here and there that the writing is of a high prose order. At times the choice of subject strikes us as freakish, but always the handling is fresh and fascinating, although we have the suspicion that the Doctor occasionally pats himself too vigorously on the back. ‘Here, you fellows, just see how cleverly I can do this sort of thing!’

After all, it is the fine moral purpose which runs throughout his prose work that commands our

admiration. We can understand how the papers had a tonic effect on society, and how the indulgence in mere comicality was but a trick to heighten the serious effect. Keen observation of men and things, acute insight into the higher social relations, variety of topic and breadth of culture, tender pathos and penetrative thought, the scorn of cowardice and praise of manliness, freedom of inquiry and liberty of prophesying, gentle satire, suggestive humour and rollicking good fun, are the gift of the Autocrat to the world of readers. *Liberavi animam meam*, said the Master to the Poet and the Young Astronomer, and in that confession we have the whole secret of Holmes's literary purpose. He was conscious of the success of his writings, and it is not without justification that he writes :—

But I do know this : I have struck a good many chords, first and last, in the consciousness of other people. I confess to a tender feeling for my little brood of thoughts. When they have been welcomed and praised it has pleased me, and if at any time they have been rudely handled and spitefully entreated it has cost me a little worry. I don't despise reputation, and I should like to be remembered as having said something worth lasting well enough to last.

In his character as essayist Holmes has been compared to Lamb. There is the common possession of a humour which was its own justification. There was a like faculty of apt illustration and an abounding play of literary

allusion. But the tone and temper of the men were poles asunder. Lamb had a radical love for the grotesque, and a devil-may-care Bohemian spirit, which would sadly have outraged Holmes's delicately preserved sense of propriety. Lamb was not afraid to let himself go, but Holmes never lost control. Further, Lamb is incomparably the greater artist: there is a full-bodied flavour in his writings and an astounding sense of literary values which Dr. Holmes with all his culture and moral doctrine hardly approaches. He comes nearer to Lamb in his fertile power of witty illustration and succinct description. It is better to take Holmes's essay work in its direct appeal to our hearts and imagination. We shall find him most effective when he is most in earnest. Strictly speaking, Holmes's literary tastes and habits were in line with the classical tradition of Pope and the eighteenth century; he preferred forms of expression which were strictly proper; the method of the Breakfast Table Series is but a development of the Addisonian essay with its intimate appeal and confidential manner. In one sense Holmes represents the originality of survival, for his propriety is but the working out of Puritan predilections, and his scientific temper a manifestation of Calvinistic logic. The claim that has been made for him—'that he never came beneath any influence whatsoever, either of any individual or of any

school'—must be understood to refer to his independence of the social and literary movements which in the second quarter of the nineteenth century agitated the minds of his New England contemporaries, and not to any singularity of literary method and temper.

In *The Autocrat* the writer tells us that 'one of these days' he would very likely write a story. It was with him a 'cherished belief' that 'every articulately-speaking human being has in him stuff for *one* novel in three volumes duodecimo.' Waiving the duodecimo as irrelevant, we can congratulate Holmes on his presentation to the world, of *one* novel in three volumes, for although the volumes have different titles, the theme is the same and the method of handling not very dissimilar. Holmes tells us that 'an author's first novel is naturally drawn, to a great extent, from his personal experiences; that is, is a literal copy of nature under various slight disguises. But the moment the author gets out of his personality, he must have the creative power, as well as the narrative art and the sentiment, in order to tell a living story; and this is rare.'

This prophetic acknowledgment of his own failure as a novelist should not blind us to certain admirable qualities in his stories. It is true that all of them have a 'medicated' flavour, that in construction they are weak, that the didactic element is a little too pronounced, that the plots

are somewhat wobbly, and that inequalities of style are too much apparent, but they hold the attention and compel the interest of the reader, and in the case of *The Guardian Angel* the story element itself proves of fascinating power. Indeed his second story is one of the best bits of work he did. The characterization, as in all his work, is most convincing, and the splendid virility of the appeal for clean, healthy living and common-sense recognition of the facts of heredity and human relationship, fully justify the transparent moral purpose of the writer. It is of little use complaining of the repetition in the novels, of ideas and motives and prejudices. Few persons, the Autocrat tells us, had 'a greater disgust for plagiarism' than himself, but Holmes had no compunction of conscience in stealing from himself. He makes the Master, referring to his one book, say 'My book and I are pretty much the same thing. Sometimes I steal from my book in my talk without mentioning it, and then I say to myself, "O, that won't do; everybody has read my book and knows it by heart." And then the other *I* says . . . "You're a—something or other—fool. They haven't read your confounded old book; besides, if they have, they have forgotten all about it."' Be the motive what it may, Holmes is brave enough to re-plough the old furrow and whistle the horses on to the same old medical tune. Besides, as

we learn in *The Autocrat*, 'he must be a poor creature that does not often repeat himself.'

We come more definitely to the heart of the matter when we question the kind of realism with which Holmes deals. On this matter, Holmes's theory is sound. In *Over the Teacups* he unburdens his mind in regard to the realism of Zola and Flaubert.

It is perfectly easy to be original by violating the laws of decency and the canons of good taste. . . . But when the poet or the story-teller invades the province of the man of science, he is on dangerous ground. . . . The first great mistake made by the ultra-realists, like Flaubert and Zola, is, as I have said, their ignoring the line of distinction between imaginative art and science. . . . Leave the description of the drains and cesspools to the hygienic specialist, the painful facts of disease to the physician, the details of the laundry to the washerwoman.

It sounds very like '*peccavi*.' For the one thing which was as a stumbling-block in the way of the critics, was the scientific realism of Holmes's novels. The medical interest played ducks and drakes with artistic propriety. *Elsie Venner* is but the working out of a problem in the logic of science; *A Mortal Antipathy* is little better than a tract on physical affinities and repulsions. The science of the subject vitiated the balance, and led Holmes to a choice of abnormalities through which he might preach his gospel or proclaim his prejudices. So while the characterization as such is good, the characters

themselves are in many cases but specialized types through whom or upon whom Holmes may state his preferences or heap the vials of his scientific or theological wrath. In *A Mortal Antipathy* Holmes hedges in a delightfully naïve fashion. 'Goldsmith and even Smollett, both having studied and practised medicine, could not by any possibility have outraged all the natural feelings of delicacy and decency as Swift and Zola have outraged them.' Dissenting altogether from the critical opinion implied in this sentence, we may rejoin that it was the very fact of medical learning which in *Elsie Venner* made the realism so repugnant and irritating. It is because in *The Guardian Angel* the writer finally allows himself to forget the pathological aspect of his heroine, that the novel stands out in its own right as a story of scheming and love. In *A Mortal Antipathy* the science riots in the discomfiture of the novelist, for the formal presentation of the story is pitifully feeble, and the literary device of lugged-in papers to explain the character of the hero and justify the realism of the writer, is a sign of waning power. As a novelist Oliver Wendell Holmes has little claim to the regard of posterity. There is no great imagination in his work. There is too great an absorption in physiological psychology. There is little of the wondrous analytic power by which George Eliot set bare the palpitating

soul of humanity. There is nothing of that great synthetic genius which Scott showed in the painting of historical pictures and in the handling of historical periods. But there is in Holmes's work charm of style, sincerity of motive, truth of fact, and brilliancy of thought, and these things have value for the world of ordinary men and women.

REFORM

MAN, Nature, and God are the three great themes upon which in multitudinous variety writers, whether small or great, play their personality. By the interpretation of a great mind concerning itself with issues of life and death, we are often led to the discovery of our own souls, but sometimes God is gracious and in the quiet of communion flashes upon us the light of Holy Spirit by which we know ourselves as of infinite value to him at whose word our souls started from the abysmal depths of being. The Professor, glancing through the book in which by the symbolism of art and the more articulate expression of literature, the young girl Iris poured out her soul, commented, 'a moment's insight is sometimes worth a life's experience.' But such moments are rare. Where they are afforded by the touch of the great artist or poet or musician by whom we may be led into the inner courts of being and hold mystic

communion with the transcendent Author of life, we enter into sympathetic relations with the begetter of our experience, by which the thought of the essential unity of all created things is confirmed, beyond all questioning by the ever inquisitive and sceptical intellect. Out of the heart are the issues of life and death ; it is the glory of the poet that he beyond all others in the realm of art, wields the power by which our whole being may be wrought into conscious fellowship with other souls, and enter into vital relations with the wondrous life which moves in the rhythmic flow of ocean and flood, robes itself in the glory of forest and field, pulses in the heart of the mighty mountains, and scatters its fragrance on the dewy air.

Of deep abiding interest to the student of literature is the message embodied in the work of an author. It may be by a subtle manifestation in literary form, as in the poetry of Swinburne, that we are lifted to high levels of spiritual feeling ; it may be by the vague ethereal atmospheric quality which permeates the writings of W. B. Yeats, Padraic Colum, Seumas O'Sullivan, and others of the modern Irish school, that we are led to recognize a care for infinite things where, before, we saw but brutality and superstition ; it may be by the passionate handling of the problems of life, in the poetry of Browning or by the setting-out of profound spiritual experi-

ence in the work of Wordsworth, that our souls are attuned to appreciation of the 'still, sad music of humanity;' but in whatever way we are brought into touch with the great spirit which gives meaning to life, we recognize that the ultimate value of an author lies in his substantial embodiment of the everlasting gospel. That gospel wins its way by virtue of the passion-penetrated art which fashions it: the cold formal statement of duty may leave us unmoved, but the same command clothed in the thunderous might of Milton shakes us into awe and reverential obedience. That we are led at all to consider the value of the message which Holmes has for the world is some sort of tribute to the worth of the art which gives it form.

Primarily we ask what are the relations of the author to the society in which he lives, what is his social gospel if he has one, how far does his message anticipate the glory of a regenerated kingdom. Holmes wrote out himself, even in dealing with matters of science and theology. His personal method allowed the expression of all kinds of opinion. In our opposition to certain phases of his thought we pay him the compliment he desired. 'A man whose opinions are not attacked is beneath contempt.'

In the evolution of society this truth has emerged; that the closer organization of the people for a common well-being allows of the

more intense expression of personality. By co-operation with each other in the provision of social needs and wants, we liberate our minds for a freer range in those things which primarily concern the individual. In deeper ways individuality is assured in our sacrifice for society. The life given in obedience to the crying needs of our fellows becomes of greater value in that by social sympathy it gathers to itself the life of the brethren and re-presents it in a progressive service. So it is that the perfection of the sacrifice of Jesus has given unto him a name that is above every name, and made his life one with all that is holy and of good report. Holmes told us that 'politically he went for *e*-quality, but socially for *the* quality.' He had a profound respect for the American constitution. 'The very aim and end of our institutions is just this: that we may think what we like and say what we think.' He was an individualist pure and simple. He belonged to that school of practical philosophy which maintains that if each does the best for himself the welfare of society will be furthered. Behind the whimsical confession, 'I cease loving my neighbour as myself until I can get away from him,' there was a good deal of truth.

Holmes shared the prejudices and limitations of his caste. Among people of equal standing he was frank and generous, in his personal dealing

with servants and dependents he was kind and considerate, at all times he was friendly and courteous—even with the bores who pestered him for autographs, but always there was the implicit insistence on the difference between a gentleman and mere ‘persons.’ In his nature he was intense, but in his social dealings he preserved certain distinctions which limited the full reaction of his personality upon society. He might have been saved for democracy by conflict and penury, but at no time was he tried by real hardship.

The truth is that he was not keenly interested in social problems. He believed in the strength and value of public opinion, and in the duty of the citizens to the State, but he did not consider himself called upon to do much in the way of social reform. The war which began in 1861, aroused him to a keener sense of his value as a member of society. He regarded it, as he tells us in *The Inevitable Trial*, as ‘for no mean, unworthy end, but for national life, for liberty everywhere, for humanity, for the kingdom of God on earth.’ It is not too much to say that until the war Holmes was not sufficiently alive to the sense of the solidarity of the nation. The necessity which drove men into comradeship and which tested the manhood of the country, irrespective of Brahmins and pariahs, forced Holmes to recognize the deeper claims of mere

humanity. But by taste and temperament he was unfitted to lead the forces of revolt; associated action was alien to his habits and preferences.

That to some who knew him well Holmes appeared as a conservative and reactionary is clear from the fact that sometime in 1846 James Russell Lowell complained of his attitude regarding war, slavery, temperance, the claims of the poor, and social reform. In his rejoinder Holmes wrote, 'I am an out-and-out republican in politics, a firm believer in the omnipotence of truth, in the constant onward struggle of the race, in the growing influence and blessed agency of the great moral principles now at work in the midst of all the errors and excesses with which they are attended.' He concludes his letter to Lowell in a very dignified tone of remonstrance.

I listen to your suggestions with great respect. I mean to reflect upon them, and I hope to gain something from them. But I must say, with regard to art and the management of my own powers, I think I shall in the main follow my own judgment and taste rather than mould myself upon those of others. I shall follow the bent of my natural thoughts; which grow more grave and tender, or will do so as years creep over me. I shall not be afraid of gayety more than of old, but I shall have more courage to be serious. Above all, I shall always be pleased rather to show what is beautiful in the life around me than to be pitching into giant vices, against which the acrid pulpit and the corrosive newspaper will always anticipate the gentle poet. Each of us has his theory

of life, of art, of his own existence and relations. It is too much to ask of you to enter fully into mine, but be very well assured that it exists,—that it has its axioms, its intuitions, its connected beliefs as well as your own. Let me try to improve and please my fellow-men after my own fashion at present; when I come to your way of thinking (this may happen) I hope I shall be found worthy of a less qualified approbation than you have felt constrained to give me at this time.

It is to be noted that sixty years ago the social problem in America was not of the intensity and magnitude that it is to-day, and that the conscience of the higher classes had not been aroused to the meaning of poverty and the morality of commercial relations. Despite Holmes's professed republicanism he had the monarchic instincts and the aristocratic strain in his nature, and this prepossession led him to accept with equanimity that division of society into rich and poor which set him on the hither side of want. There is hardly a hint in his writings that the poor exist; certainly there is little of that passion for common humanity which sets us afire with social zeal and burns up the selfish dross of our individual natures. But there is a gently emphasized word for the much-abused rich and fashionable folk, and there is a frank statement of social preferences which somewhat breaks down our critical opposition and reconciles us to his rôle as priest and prophet of the Brahmin caste. Here and there are signs

that Holmes did not appreciate the democratic impulse which to-day is fulfilling itself in socialism and labour organization, and which fifty years ago was regarded with intense suspicion as something making for mere anarchy and social licence. So in *The Poet* we have the usual idea of socialism as 'levelling everything smack, and trampling us under foot,' and the witty comment, 'You can't keep a dead level long, if you burn everything down flat to make it. Why, bless your soul, if all the cities of the world were reduced to ashes, you'd have a new set of millionaires in a couple of years or so, out of the trade in potash.' In the account of the Saturnians given in *Over the Teacups* there is a delicious satire on socialism which even the most strenuous socialistic reformer can read with profit and appreciation.

All Saturnians are born equal, live equal, and die equal. . . . The one thing the Saturnians dread and abhor is *inequality*. The whole object of their laws and customs is to maintain the strictest equality in everything—social relations, property, so far as they can be said to have anything which can be so called, mode of living, dress, and all other matters. . . . All their clothes are of one pattern. I noticed that there were no pockets in any of their garments, and learned that a pocket would be considered *prima facie* evidence of theft, as no honest person would have use for such a secret receptacle. . . . There are the Orthobrachians, who declaim against the shameful abuse of the left arm and hand, and insist on restoring their perfect equality with the right. Then there are Isopodic societies, which insist

on bringing back the original equality of the upper and lower limbs. If you can believe it, they actually practise going on all fours—generally in a private way, a few of them together, but hoping to bring the world round to them in the near future.

We can well understand how in such a society the endemic disease should be *anchylosis* of the lower jaw, due to 'prolonged and inveterate gaping or yawning:' and when we learn that 'intoxication and suicide are their chief recreations,' our only comment is 'Just so!' But after all, is there any point in the satire, which is the product of the year 1888? For even twenty years ago, the conception of socialism as a cut-and-dried equality of everything had largely disappeared from the doctrine of its philosophers. The radical individualism of Holmes would not allow him to recognize the virtue of that equality which the socialists and labourmen demanded, and which was rather an equality of opportunity than of possession.

We should not complain of his social conservatism, if no opportunity had been given him of understanding the tendency of his generation. But among the mid-century New England writers he is unique in his neglect of the great problems which were being projected in the aims and aspirations of the people.

Perhaps particular reference to his attitude towards slavery may help us to form an approxi-

mately correct opinion of his worth as a social reformer. He was brought up in an atmosphere that was not detrimental to the idea of slavery. His maternal grandfather was an owner of slaves received by inheritance. His father, who lived many years in Georgia, saw the best side of slavery, and so learned to regard it with indulgence if not with approbation. The slaves were well looked after, not too hardly worked, and in many cases differed in standing but little from the hired dependents; indeed many of them enjoyed the confidence and affectionate regard of their owners. Referring to the influence of his father in this matter, Holmes says, 'I did not receive from him the strong feeling of hatred and opposition to the institution which many Northern children inherited from their parents.' He adds, 'So, when the negroes were excluded from the Common on artillery election day by general consent, it was natural that I should not have been so ready for sympathy with the abolition movement as those young boys and men who were differently educated.'

He had had no experience which compelled him to think of slave-owning as an undesirable thing for society, and his natural bias towards the right of aristocracy kept him from the movement for abolition. In *The Poet* he speaks of a book which he found in the 'Library Hospital' of the gambrel-roofed house, and which dealt

with the 'Negro Plot' at New York. It 'helped to implant a feeling in me which it took Mr. Garrison a good many years to root out.' We cannot but think that Holmes is exaggerating the importance of this early literary influence. It may be that the book intensified an antipathy to the negro as a man and a brother, but it is not likely that it originated a feeling which was proof against the enthusiasm of Lowell and Parker and Whittier for the cause of the slaves. Holmes was constitutionally out of sympathy with the abolitionists, and only slowly came to recognize the justice and righteousness of their movement. We know that later he came into line with the reform. In *The Inevitable Trial* there is unmistakable condemnation of slavery. It is to the credit of the War that Holmes was finally wrought into complete acquiescence with the demands of the North. His patriotism which never at any time lost its savour, led him to a better understanding of the motive of the men of the South who were fighting for the individualism which among other things allowed them to do as they liked with their own possessions and keep their bodies of slaves. Mr. F. B. Sanborn, who was in the struggle which ultimately resulted in the closer federation of the States, refers to the Boston conservatives who by their political opponents were called 'Hunkers.'

They made up the powerful class which controlled the

market, the college, and the drawing-room ; they opened or closed at will the avenues of preferment for young men of talent ; they ignored Emerson, loathed Garrison, detested Parker, ridiculed Alcott and Margaret Fuller, tolerated Sumner and Phillips for a time on account of their talents, and then quietly sent them to Coventry. In this well-fed, well-bred minority, supported by a well-fed, but ill-bred majority, Dr. Holmes was content to remain for years, scoffing at reformers now and then to please his audience.

But the Civil War changed all that, and when it broke out, says Mr. Sanborn, 'none stood more firmly by the cause of the North than the laughing Professor. He sent his eldest son to the fight, and saw him twice or thrice wounded, without shrinking from the sacrifice which his country demanded. This manly attitude, from which Dr. Holmes never receded, atoned, in the eyes even of his cousin Wendell Phillips, for the early antagonism to what few men then recognized as the sacred cause of civilization.'

We are not to suppose then that Holmes was altogether devoid of the spirit that makes for reform. But he had to overcome the inertia of his inheritance and constitutional antipathies. Granted the rush of a mighty movement, granted sufficient time, and Holmes might be trusted to be on the side of those whose work made for peace and righteousness and justice. It needed a war to shake him into anything like comradeship with the rank and file of the nation.

In estimating therefore the influence of Holmes

in the direction of reform our opinion of his value will be modified by the fact of his essentially conservative social nature. Even in matters that did not directly affect either him or his country, his opinion was in favour of the *status quo*, as in his condemnation of the Irish in their attempt to free themselves from the political dominion of England. He was somewhat more liberal in his attitude to the movement with which the name of Mrs. Abby Kelley Foster is so intimately associated. When the friends of the women's movement were fighting for the admission of women to the Harvard Medical School, Dr. Holmes was obliged to give a definite opinion. Dr. Cheever says, his 'kindly nature inclined him to the claims of the other sex, but he voted with the majority for prudential reasons,' that is, in excluding women from the medical school. But he was willing to capitulate when the women proved their power. In an address given at the opening of the new building of the Harvard Medical School, Dr. Holmes said, 'if here and there an intrepid woman insists on taking by storm the fortress of medical education, I would have the gate flung open to her, as if it were that of the citadel of Orleans and she were Joan of Arc returning from the field of victory.' There is a passage, however, in *A Mortal Antipathy* which seems to embody more exactly Holmes's judgment on the matter.

Doctors and side-saddles don't seem to me to go together. . . . I am for giving women every chance for a good education, and if they think medicine is one of their proper callings let them try it. I think they will find that they had better at least limit themselves to certain specialities, and always have an expert of the other sex to fall back upon. The trouble is that they are so impressible and imaginative that they are at the mercy of all sorts of fancy systems. . . . Charlatanism always hobbles on two crutches, the tattle of women, and the certificates of clergymen, and I am afraid that half the women doctors will be too much under both those influences.

It is safe to say that so far women doctors have not justified the opinion of the good man regarding the predominant influences which would cause them to degrade their vocation.

In *Elsie Venner* and elsewhere, Holmes pleads for the higher education of women. He recognizes the power for good which the mind of a cultured woman exercises, and has little fear of the becried danger that education will unfit a woman for the practical duties of life. At least he is willing to run the risk. But his own tastes are for the old-fashioned womanly woman, who accepts her limitations in a grateful way and is content to shine in the necessary virtues of domesticity. So 'it is a woman's business to please' and to demonstrate the good taste of Eve who preferred to talk with the man than with the angel. Most women, he thinks, are too finely organized for the rough ways of a life which has been 'adjusted to the wants of the stronger sex.'

Holmes always appreciated the tender womanly graces estimated to command the sentimental adoration of the poet. He liked the talk of pretty women, and deprecated the cold-blooded rationalism of the 'Model of all the Virtues,' or 'the old fellah in petticoats,' as the young man John very irreverently called her. 'Intellect is to woman's nature what her watch-spring skirt is to her dress; it ought to underlie her silks and embroideries, but not to show itself too staringly on the outside.' So, the Schoolmistress who so beautifully wins her way into the heart of the Autocrat, and whose wooing is so tender and whose answer—'I will walk the *long path* with you!'—so complete, is the best type of real womanliness Holmes has given us. Iris too makes a pathetic appeal and emphasizes unstressed qualities which the character of the Schoolmistress involves. But the rest of Holmes's women are either ordinary vulgar types or pathological subjects or social and religious freaks. Even Myrtle Hazard with all her charm fails to convince us as to her 'muliebrity' and 'femineity.' In *The Autocrat* Holmes deprecates the self-assertion which free suffrage develops in most women; but he has so much to say regarding the worth of women to the world that, in the light of his later ideas, we are willing to condone his offences of criticism. So he 'would have a woman as true as Death.' He was ready

to believe that a new revelation had been granted to the world and that the name of its Messiah was Woman. He claimed that women were 'twice as religious as men.' He told us truly enough that 'the real religion of the world comes from women much more than from men—from mothers most of all, who carry the key of our souls in their bosoms.' He reminded us of the delicate 'sixth sense' by which women divine suffering, and enter intuitively into the needs of the afflicted of the earth. So that when the Autocrat in the rush of tender feeling exclaims, 'God bless all good women!—to their soft hands and pitying hearts we must all come at last!' we gently whisper 'Amen,' and thank God for all the help and inspiration given to the world by the nameless multitude of noble women who have lived in the faith of their love and died in the hope of God's redeeming compassion.

It would not be fair to close this brief account of Holmes's social influence without referring to the stand he made among the men of his profession for common-sense in medical practice and for the recognition of the instability of science in its progressive development. He had an utter aversion to all pseudo-science such as phrenology, and in *The Professor* made delicious fun of brain-pan prognostication. Holmes's reputation as a medical reformer rests securely on his work in counteracting the contagiousness of puerperal

fever. In *The Professor* there is a reference to this phase of his life.

When, by the permission of Providence, I held up to the professional public the damnable facts connected with the conveyance of poison from one young mother's chamber to another's, for doing which humble office I desire to be thankful that I have lived, though nothing else good should ever come of my life, I had to bear the sneers of those whose position I had assailed, and, as I believe, have at last demolished, so that nothing but the ghosts of dead women stir among the ruins.

This is the one indubitable contribution of Oliver Wendell Holmes to the elements of reform.

It would be stupid not to recognize that despite class prejudice, conservatism, and invincible egotism, the writings of Holmes predispose us to the love of our fellows and to the work for the regeneration of society. About his poetry and prose there is an air of genial kindness which stimulates us to the service of the brethren. Even the limitations of his sympathy serve to correct our own short-comings. It is true that as he himself admitted in a letter to Mrs. Beecher Stowe, he was not 'a great moral reformer,' but his writings are sincere, the moral tone high, and the influence invariably for sane appreciations of life. W. D. Howells says truly, 'He was not a prophet like Emerson, nor even a voice crying in the wilderness like Whittier or Lowell. His note was heard rather amid the sweet security

of streets, but it was always for a finer and gentler civility.' After all, the private virtues which the life and writings of Holmes illustrated, and the individualism for which he stood, are among the prime factors making for social reform. It may be that

He was not armed to wrestle with the storm,
To fight for homely truth with vulgar power ;

but to him was granted an indefinable subtle spiritual quality by which the minds of his readers are cleansed and strengthened and rendered fitter to grapple with the problems at the heart of life, and with the evil inherent in society.

RELIGION

It is as a force making for clear conceptions of the universe, for wide-mindedness in theology, and for reality in religion, that Holmes claims our highest regard. If not in the deepest sense, yet in a way that prepares our souls for high communion with the things of God, Holmes is a religious teacher. He emphasizes the necessity of spiritual brotherhood, and recognizes that we may pass by the way of human love into the deeper relations of the soul with God. He proclaims 'the absolute, unconditional spiritual liberty of each individual immortal soul,' and with a ring of triumph in his tone, sings

That one unquestioned text we read,
All doubt beyond, all fear above,
Nor crackling pile nor cursing creed
Can burn or blot it : GOD IS LOVE !

He pleads for freedom of inquiry, 'every soul is to look for truth with its own eyes,' and tells us that 'truth is tough,' and by no means an

invalid, and that 'fear of open discussion implies feebleness of inward conviction.' He refers to those who attempt 'to make private property of the grace of God,' and asks his fellows to recognize that 'humanity is of immeasurably greater importance' than the specific creeds held by mere individuals. 'We must not allow any creed or religion whatsoever to confiscate to its own private use and benefit the virtues which belong to our common humanity.'

Although antagonistic to Rome and a determined critic of Calvinism, he preferred evolution to revolution in theology, and at times could speak tenderly of the superstitions of the uncultured. 'We must not roughly smash other people's idols because we know, or think we know, that they are of cheap human manufacture.' Yet he saw clearly the choice to which men were moving, Rome or Reason, 'the sovereign Church or the free soul, authority or personality, God in us or God in our masters,' and although to him Romanism was 'infinitely more human than Calvinism,' he was not prepared to sacrifice his sense of religious independence to the mere æsthetic or sentimental satisfaction which the Church of Rome offered. Not that he was unmindful of the spiritual and social values of traditional feeling, for in *The Inevitable Trial* he admits that 'in all questions involving duty, we act from sentiments. Religion springs from

them, the family order rests upon them, and in every community each act involving a relation between any two of its members implies the recognition or the denial of a sentiment.' But for him life held responsibilities of rationality which to neglect meant degeneration and disintegration. He offered to God the worship of a whole nature in the belief that 'if a created being has no rights which his Creator is bound to respect, there is an end to all moral relations between them,' for to man belongs the right of questioning and of knowledge, and the impulse to discover the springs of moral and spiritual existence. So the young Astronomer makes his demand upon God in the strength of a motive primarily intellectual.

I claim the right of knowing whom I serve,
Else is my service idle ; He that asks
My homage asks it from a reasoning soul.
To crawl is not to worship.

This sense of the value of rationality, of intellectual order, is fundamental in Holmes's religion and philosophy. He shared the temper of the liberal religionists of New England, and made a continual protest against the theology which to his mind insulted the moral dignity of man and vitiated that consciousness of worth which is a prime factor in all human progress. In a splendid passage in *Wind-clouds and Star-drifts* he pleads

for truth of being and the consecration of the life to brave purposes of inquiry, and expresses his faith in the compassionate nature of God.

I dare not be a coward with my lips
Who dare to question all things in my soul ;
Some men may find their wisdom on their knees,
Some prone and grovelling in the dust like slaves ;
Let the meek glow-worm glisten in the dew ;
I ask to lift my taper to the sky
As they who hold their lamps above their heads,
Trusting the larger currents up aloft,
Rather than crossing eddies round their breast,
Threatening with every puff the flickering blaze.
My life shall be a challenge, not a truce !
This is my homage to the mightier powers,
To ask my boldest question, undismayed
By muttered threats that some hysteric sense
Of wrong or insult will convulse the throne
Where wisdom reigns supreme ; and if I err,
They all must err who have to feel their way
As bats that fly at noon ; for what are we
But creatures of the night, dragged forth by day,
Who needs must stumble, and with stammering steps
Spell out their paths in syllables of pain ?
Thou wilt not hold in scorn the child who dares
Look up to Thee, the Father,—dares to ask
More than Thy wisdom answers. From Thy hand
The worlds were cast ; yet every leaflet claims
From that same hand its little shining sphere
Of star-lit dew ; thine image, the great sun,
Girt with his mantle of tempestuous flame,
Glares in mid-heaven ; but to his noon-tide blaze
The slender violet lifts its lidless eye,
And from his splendour steals its fairest hue,
Its sweetest perfume from his scorching fire.

The poetic value of the passage, its rhythm and imagery, its utter sincerity and courageous faith, confirm the idea that Holmes wrote best when he forgot his audience and lost himself in the passion of conviction. The emotional quality of religion is given in the temper which marks the lines of the young Astronomer, for Holmes was by no means cold-blooded and formal in his belief. In *The Professor* he quotes approvingly the saying, 'the heart makes the theologian,' and in announcing that he belongs to the 'Broad Church' he says, 'I am afraid the only Broad Church possible is one that has its creed in the heart, and not in the head,—that we shall know its members by their fruits, and not by their words.' Yet, as necessary to a healthy religious life, Holmes demands truth of intellectual being, even when truth destroys the quiet that superstition and error fostered. 'Truth is often very uncomfortable,' he writes to Mr. Kimball. 'I can't help it whether I gain or lose by a truth; I *must* accept it.' And although he had not 'the least personal desire to change *any* other person's faith, who lives in peace with God and man, except just so far as he is an aggressive spiritual neighbour,' he liked to state his beliefs to inquiring minds, 'and these of course are principally young persons, and especially of the intellectual classes.'

In his writings, there is occasionally the sug-

gestion that he confounds truth and reality. So he tells us that 'Truth is invariable,' but he admits that the personal apprehension of truth is specific and peculiar. Some of us would prefer to speak of reality as invariable, and of truth as concerned only with the consciously maintained relations of man with reality. So the religion of truth is progressive in its nature, since the very relativity of truth is demonstrated in the changing conceptions of man due to the influence of science and philosophy. The truth is our perception of reality, and depends on the nature of our experience, and the culture of mind and soul.

Holmes readily admits the influence of comparative religion in re-fashioning our ideas of revelation and religion. 'You must have comparative theology as you have comparative anatomy,' for 'you can't know too much of your race and its beliefs, if you want to know anything about your Maker.' He is not unaware of the hostility with which 'the comparatively new science of man' is regarded by the religions of authority, but he has a firm belief in the intrinsic power of knowledge to win its way to recognition despite the barriers which an interested nescience may erect. 'We have studied anthropology through theology; we have now to begin the study of theology through anthropology.' There is just a trace of

prejudice when he tells us 'that we need not go to any ancient records for our anthropology,' for surely the Bible is as valuable as chips of pottery in making known to us the history of man's mind and in setting out the pictures of social relations and primitive customs and ancient religious ceremonies. That theologians have derived degrading systems of theology from its pages is no reason why we should reject the valid contributions to the science of man which the Bible undoubtedly furnishes. We agree with Holmes that 'nothing is so dangerous to intellectual virility as to have a so-called infallible book to fall back upon,' but the work of modern criticism is giving us the Bible in a new form, so that we can recognize its social and religious and scientific value without endangering either our rationality or our faith.

In *The Professor* there is some play on the idea of 'depolarizing' the language of religion and of the Bible. Symbols representative of thought become charged with meanings which originally were foreign to them. Holmes thinks that 'if every idea our Bible contains could be shelled out of its old symbol and put into a new, clean, unmagnetic word, we should have some chance of reading it as philosophers, or wisdom-lovers, ought to read it.' But he fears that 'the faith of our Christian community is not robust enough to bear the turning of our most sacred language

into its depolarized equivalents,' and he recalls the time when shrieks of 'Blasphemy!' were evoked by Dr. Channing's famous Baltimore discourse on 'Unitarian Christianity,' delivered on May 5, 1819, at the ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks to the pastoral care of the First Independent Church.

But if, as the Professor earlier says, 'every language is a temple, in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined,' we do not wish to 'depolarize' the language of religion, since, as the ages go by, the symbols of our faith act more surely as the key whereby we enter into the religious experience of generations, and feel the soul of humanity as it is gathered up in the word which pulses with the passion of prayer or rings with the triumph of sacrifice.

Indeed, we make bold to think that Dr. Channing's work was in the direction of revitalizing the language of orthodoxy and enriching the meaning of its doctrines by a rationalized spiritual experience. Holmes himself seems to share this idea when he says, 'What you bring away from the Bible depends to some extent on what you carry to it.' That he also gave value to the symbol as such is clear when he speaks of 'the cross of the Redeemer' as the 'dearest object of love and honor,' but this kind of phraseology is very rare in his writings.

About much of Holmes's writing there is the

theological atmosphere. He seems to have had a natural tendency to theology, and this showed itself in discussions regarding God, free-will, sin, the function of science, and the revelation by Nature. His father had been brought up in the tradition of Calvinism, but his mother belonged to 'liberal' ways of thought. In his autobiographical notes Holmes writes :

The influence of his surroundings on my father was that which has always been noticed where Unitarianism comes into contact with the dehumanized creeds of the churches. It is not so much in making converts to its organization as it is in softening the harsh beliefs of those with whom it comes in contact. . . . My father felt that he did his duty in expecting my mother to hear me recite the shorter Westminster Catechism. My mother, like a faithful wife as she was, sobered her pleasant countenance, and sat down to hear us recite of 'justification,' 'adoption,' and 'sanctification,' and the rest of the programme. We learned nominally that we were a set of little fallen wretches, exposed to the wrath of God by the fact of that existence which we could not help. I do not think we believed a word of it, or even understood much of its phraseology.

Holmes believed that children should be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but he had a horror of that kind of education which makes healthy children into little spiritual prigs, and he deprecated the reading of literature saturated with 'pathological piety.' He liked the natural child full of mischief and fun and high spirits, who got into scrapes and out of them, and looked on life as a glorious

opportunity for play. He preferred the child who asked questions and was only more or less satisfied with the answers, and he despised the 'half-vitalized mental negatives,' the 'excellent little wretches who grow up in what they are taught, with never a scruple or a query,' for they were negligible factors so far as the intellectual progress of the people was concerned. He liked to think of the heritage of the young American, of the freedom into which he was born, and of the acquisition of 'the last franchise which men withhold from man—that of stating the laws of his spiritual being and the beliefs he accepts without hindrance except from clearer views of truth.' Much of his activity was spent in the fight against orthodoxy and the doctrine of Calvin—the 'stain of his boyhood'—and he found it hard at times to be charitable with those good men and women whose 'God' was his 'Devil.' In *The Autocrat* he writes :

We frequently see persons in insane hospitals, sent there in consequence of what are called *religious* mental disturbances. I confess that I think better of them than of many who hold the same notions, and keep their wits and appear to enjoy life very well, outside of the asylums. Any decent person ought to go mad, if he really holds such or such opinions. It is very much to his discredit in every point of view, if he does not.

So he thinks of Calvinism as barbarism, but a barbarism strong and mighty, able to crush the

whole human race to the dust, 'in the name of the Lord of Hosts.' So far as we can gather there is little evidence in the life and writings of Holmes to lead us to think that he suffered to any great extent from the doctrines he was supposed to imbibe. His father had strains of liberality in his theological nature, and the society which surrounded him was permeated by the doctrine of Unitarianism. We can only suppose that he fought to break the shackles from the limbs of his enslaved brethren, and to help them to realize that God is the God of the living and not simply of those dead to the beauty of the world, the joy of existence, and the glory of an enlightened science. He considered it a less violence to nature, 'to deify protoplasm' than to 'diabolize the Deity,' and he protested against the 'wolf logic' which condemned a man because in far-off days Adam the father of us all muddied the stream of our existence. The idea of eternal punishment was abhorrent to him, he was 'disposed to look favourably upon the doctrine of the universal restoration to holiness and happiness of all fallen intelligences, whether human or angelic.'

He did not have things all his own way in his onslaught upon Calvinism. There were valiant defenders of the faith who denounced him as an 'infidel,' and tried to show that his writings had immoral tendencies. In a letter to Motley, in

1861, he exclaims, 'But, oh! such a belaboring as I have had from the so-called "evangelical" press, for the last two or three years, almost without intermission! There must be a great deal of weakness and rottenness, when such extreme bitterness is called out by such a good-natured person as I can claim to be in print.'

But with all his good-nature he was a formidable opponent, and at times could touch keenly the sore places of his antagonists, so that we are not surprised that they yelled with pain and rage, and called down weighty judgment on his theological head. His position as a fighter was very clear and simple, 'all persons who proclaim a belief which passes judgment on their neighbours must be ready to have it "unsettled," that is, questioned, at all times and by anybody—just as those who set up bars across a thoroughfare must expect to have them taken down by every one who wants to pass, if he is strong enough.' Holmes was happy in seeing a change of theological temper, and the gradual sympathetic approximations of radically diverse intellectual systems. In his later years theology could become the subject of conversation without the fear of bitter squabbling. There was an ever-increasing respect for individual opinion, and a diminished questioning of the truth of spiritual experience even where this seemed to be conditioned by cramping ideas of God and the

universe. It is true, as Holmes says, that 'to grow up in a narrow creed and to grow out of it is a tremendous trial of one's nature,' but in the trial there is not seldom generated a sympathy which reacts upon society and helps to banish those ideas which aforetime bound and crippled the soul. Holmes was of the opinion that Spiritualism in directing intensified attention to the life beyond the grave had been a powerful force in the disintegration of orthodoxy, and this may be conceded. But of greater importance and value was the doctrine of evolution, which set the relations of Creator and created in a new light, and substituted 'infinite hope in the place of infinite despair for the vast majority of mankind.' In *The Autocrat* Holmes wrote, 'I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving,' and the thought of evolutionary process with its integrating and disintegrating phases deepens the sense of responsibility and opens out vistas of ideal development which the old-fashioned orthodoxy could not present.

Holmes's conception of science and its function in the reorganization of religious belief helps us to understand somewhat the limitations which mark his philosophy of religion. For he gives a greater value to Naturalism in religion than many to-day would be willing to concede. He looks to science to proclaim 'the rise of man,'

and to free the mind from the deadening influence of spiritual pessimism. Science can never be 'the enemy of religion ; for, if so, then religion would mean ignorance. But it is often the antagonist of school-divinity.' Science is religious in so far as it means the 'unfolding of the divine purpose,' but since 'scientific certainty has no spring in it, no courtesy, no possibility of yielding,' it lacks the sweet virtues that make for compassion, and somewhat partakes of the temper of insolence. To which we may add that science as the mere record of things observed would be a very dull thing without the interpreting mind which gives variety to scientific conclusions.

He smiles now and then at the airs 'Science' puts on, for there are times when science illustrates the vices of orthodoxy and traditional authority, when 'she stands marking time, but not getting on, while the trumpets are blowing and the big drums beating.' But in the main he is loyal to science as the discipline by which men have been wrought into deeper harmony with the purposes of God. The sight of the planet Venus changed his conception of the universe ; the knowledge given in astronomy and geology set him in truer relations with the world in which he lived. In his introductory lecture delivered in 1861 to the Harvard medical students, he says :

To fear science or knowledge lest it disturb our old beliefs, is to fear the influx of the Divine wisdom into the souls of our fellow-men ; for what is science but the piece-meal *revelation*,—uncovering,—of the plan of creation, by the agency of those chosen prophets of nature whom God has illuminated from the central light of truth for that single purpose ?

It is interesting and somewhat astonishing to note that despite the idea of Nature as ‘a true divine manifestation,’ there is little trace in the writings of Holmes of that religion of Nature which in the poetry of Wordsworth makes such a profound appeal to our spiritual intuitions. Here and there is a word which indicates the intense feeling with which Holmes approached Nature, but in general while he loves Nature and revels in her beauty and uses her to adorn his images and give grace to his similes, there is nothing of the faith by which the soul may pass through the outward seeming form to the very life of things. The scientific appreciation of Nature seemed to hinder a whole-hearted surrender to her power. There was the intellectual apprehension of the truth of the unity of Nature, but there was not that understanding which giveth wisdom. So nothing was clearer to his mind than that ‘all things are in all things, and that just according to the intensity and extension of our mental being we shall see the many in the one and the one in the many.’ But the poetry holds nothing of the *experience* of that unity,

and the prose is content with literary devices. So when he speaks of a pebble as the 'throne of the all-pervading Deity, who has guided its every atom since the rosary of heaven was strung with beaded stars,' we acknowledge the cleverness of the writing but we are left unmoved. He was not without the sense of a relation with the larger life of the world, but he rarely expressed this in his writings. In the lines on Shakespeare he says :

We praise not star or sun ; in these we see
Thee, Father, only Thee !

And in *The Ploughman* he addresses Mother Earth in tender tones, but shows himself no whole-hearted a worshipper.

O gracious Mother, whose benignant breast
Wakes us to life, and lulls us all to rest,
How thy sweet features, kind to every clime,
Mock with their smile the wrinkled front of time ! . . .
Yet, O our Mother, while uncounted charms
Steal round our hearts in thine embracing arms,
Let not our virtues in thy love decay,
And thy fond sweetness waste our strength away.

Here is an implicit distrust of that healing influence by which Nature fits us for the sternest conflict with life, and nerves us to attempt the glory of the ideal. So in *The Autocrat* there is drawn a comparison between the mountains and the sea, in which the sense of the life behind is lost in simile and metaphor not always convincing.

You can domesticate mountains, but the sea is *ferae naturae*. . . . The sea remembers nothing. It is feline. It licks your feet,—its huge flanks purr very pleasantly for you ; but it will crack your bones and eat you, for all that, and wipe the crimsoned foam from its jaws as if nothing had happened. The mountains give their lost children berries and water ; the sea mocks their thirst and lets them die. The mountains have a grand, stupid, lovable tranquillity ; the sea has a fascinating, treacherous intelligence. The mountains lie about like huge ruminants, their broad backs awful to look upon, but safe to handle. The sea smooths its silver scales until you cannot see their joints,—but their shining is that of a snake's belly, after all.—In deeper suggestiveness I find as great a difference. The mountains dwarf mankind and foreshorten the procession of its long generations. The sea drowns out humanity and time ; it has no sympathy with either ; for it belongs to eternity, and of that it sings its monotonous song for ever and ever.

We may be pardoned for saying that the comparison carries no conviction, for Nature in all her phases, in simple obedience to the law of her physical being shows no preferences ; she reveals no consciousness of human needs and woes. But inasmuch as her life reveals purpose and order, so we may pass by the symbolism of her form into the heart and mind of God, and renew our souls in the eternal fount of all being. Holmes never got beyond the mere appearance of Nature. So far as he went, he was in the right direction, 'if you would be happy in Berkshire, you must carry mountains in your brains ; and if you would enjoy Nahant, you must have an ocean in your soul,' but he never

realized the deeper truth of that idea, although in Maurice Kirkwood's papers on the ocean, river, and lake, in *A Mortal Antipathy*, he shows how Nature in some of her aspects may minister to the morbid mind or to the soul ill at ease. His position is clearly indicated in the sentence, 'Nature plays at dominoes with you ; you must match her piece, or she will never give it up to you.'

Throughout his work however there is an intense artistic appreciation of Nature. He is a keen and accurate observer of her ways. He is subdued to the thought of her power. He is entranced by her beauty and wrought into passionate admiration of her many devices. At times he accepts the parables of her being and turns them to good account, as when in *The Autocrat* he discourses on ancient error and new truth from the text of the stone which upturned reveals bleached grass and creeping things innumerable. But we like him best when he simply tells us what he sees, or when he is talking of the big trees he loved with all the passion of his heart. It is here that he comes nearest to Wordsworth ; when he is speaking of the intelligence of the roots of trees, or when he revels in the comfort their presence affords. His visit to England owed some of its pleasure to the beautiful trees which ennoble our English parks. In *Our Hundred Days* he writes :

We find our most soothing companionship in the trees among which we have lived, some of which we may ourselves have planted. We lean against them, and they never betray our trust; they shield us from the sun and from the rain; their spring welcome is a new birth, which never loses its freshness; they lay their beautiful robes at our feet in autumn; in winter they 'stand and wait,' emblems of patience and of truth, for they hide nothing, not even the little leaf-buds which hint to us of hope, the last element in their triple symbolism.

He loved to measure the girth of the great trees. In his early days, a measuring-tape was an indispensable element to the enjoyment of his lecture-tours, and he would go miles out of his way to visit a tree of renown. Near his house at Beverly Farms there was the finest oak of his acquaintance. He never passed it 'without a bow and a genuflexion.' Speaking one day to the gentleman, Mr. Morse, on whose land it stood, he said, 'Ah, John, you think that you own that tree; but you don't, *it owns you!*'

The Autocrat made his first advances to the schoolmistress in their visit to the English and American elms on the Mall, and we see in this relation some subtle indication of the depth of his arboreal passion.

But in it all there are modifications and reservations, he will not deliver his soul into their hands, for with all their life and beauty and meekness, they are but limited organisms, 'vast beings endowed with life, but not with soul,—which

outgrow us and outlive us, but stand helpless—poor things!—while Nature dresses and undresses them like so many full-sized, but under-witted children.'

The Nature description in his poetry is pleasing yet not to be compared with the delightsomeness of Burns's lyrics, or the sensuous beauty of Keats, or the artistic creativeness of Tennyson; but occasionally he charms us, as in the description of April, in *Spring*.

At last young April, ever frail and fair,
Woody by her playmate with the golden hair,
Chased to the margin of receding floods
O'er the soft meadows starred with opening buds,
In tears and blushes sighs herself away,
And hides her cheek beneath the flowers of May.

The treatment of Nature by Holmes is significant of the utter rationality of his intellectual method. He feared to lose control of himself, to subjugate himself to powers and influences playing through inferior forms. We see the same instinct of self-preservation in his distrust of democracy, and we have a like manifestation in his handling of specific religious and theological problems, for his religion is spiritual individualism, 'seek thine own welfare, true to man and God!' Yet his work in preparing men for new revelation, by the critical examination of existing notions and by the insistence on science as divine manifestation, exonerates him from any charge of spiritual

selfishness : in season and out of season he bore sturdy witness to the saving grace of truth, in the hope that men might be led from theological error into the joy and freedom of the spirit of God.

Although much of his later thought shows the strong influence of physiological science, he was ready at most times to acknowledge the limitations of scientific function. In *The Mechanism of Vital Actions*, published in 1857, he says, 'the doctrine of an immortal spirit will never come from the dissecting-room or the laboratory, unless it is first carried thither from a higher sphere. Yet there is nothing in these workshops that can efface it, any more than their gases and exhalations can blot out the stars of heaven.' In the same essay he discusses life as a manifestation of force through physical organisms. He favours that definition of life which regards it not merely as a condition or state of interchanging vital elements, but as the 'cause' of vital phenomena. Life appears as movement, as action, and 'is referred to force commonly called vital, and this to a power having its center in the Divine Being : for all who recognize a Divinity are agreed that all power comes from him.'

Holmes subscribes to the doctrine of divine immanence, since it stops metaphysical inquiry as to the nature and origin of things ; and he emphasizes the idea of sufficient reason for all change in Nature. He sees the things of the

world in relation with each other, he notes the play of stimuli and the response of organisms, and he interprets life in terms of the Divine vital force manifesting itself in the multitudinous relations of objects with each other. But he strains our consent when he says, 'the creation of matter out of nothing is perfectly credible as a fact, but not definitely conceivable by our imaginations,' for there is no fact in creation of the character he suggests, unless 'nothing' is to be interpreted in terms of the modern idea, 'where there is nothing there is God.' Holmes recognizes two great divisions in creation.

To the first class of his creatures, the Deity sustains only active relations. All their qualities, functions, adjustments, harmonies, are immediate expressions of his wisdom and power. Every specific form is a manifestation of the supreme thought. Every elemental movement is the sovereign's self in action. . . . To the second class of his creatures, the Creator stands in passive as well as active relations. They are no longer simple instruments to do his bidding. They may disobey him, and violate the harmonies of the universe. They have the great prerogative of self-determination which with knowledge of the moral relations of their acts, constitutes them responsible beings.

But Holmes acknowledges the mystery of the spiritual nature, the perpetual miracle of divine manifestation and creation, and the apparent break in the order of created things given in the fact of self-conscious spiritual existence. So the spiritual nature has only incidental and tem-

porary relations with merely physical life. But, he concedes, 'the further our examination extends, the more completely the organic or simply vital forces appear to resolve themselves into manifestations of those closely related or mutually convertible principles which give activity to the unconscious portion of the universe.' He inclines therefore to the idea of the essential unity of all life in its universal manifestation. So in the book of the Master he writes, 'Men have sought out many inventions, but they can have contrived nothing which did not exist as an idea in the omniscient consciousness to which past, present, and future are alike Now.'

As time went by, however, Holmes's psychology hardened somewhat, and became more definitely physiological, although he seemed to hold by the idea of the continuity of mental life, and its parallel course with a physical series. But as he said in *Over the Teacups*, he knew 'too little about the laws of brain-force to be dogmatic with reference to it.' He thought there might be something in 'cerebricity' or 'brain action through space without material symbolism;' but the language shows the tendency of his ideas to the theory of physiological function as altogether explanatory of mental phenomena. In *The Poet* he tells us that good talk is not a matter of the will, but depends on the 'active congestion of the brain;' he parenthetically adds, 'you

know we are all half-materialists nowadays.' In his brilliant but irritating lecture on *Mechanism in Thought and Morals*, delivered in 1870, he speaks of the effect of body or matter on mind, and the dependence of thought on physical function; 'so long as a sound brain is supplied with fresh blood, it perceives, thinks, wills.' But the impression that such language would convey is corrected in a foot-note, which makes the brain but the 'immediate instrument' through which mental 'phenomena are manifested.' Why he should not use 'mind' instead of 'brain' when he is referring to mental manifestations we do not know, save in so far as the former word might seem to destroy that part of his argument which says 'it is possible therefore, and I have tried to show that it is not improbable, that memory is a material record.' But at the beginning of his lecture he admitted that what it was that read the record was still an open question. Throughout the whole address there is a confusion of terminology. When he pleases, he speaks of mind and thought, or, in another place, of brain and nerves, so that at the end, while we gladly acknowledge that he has validly emphasized the present necessary connexion of the psychical and physical series, we are not clear that he has succeeded in rightly differentiating the functions of either.

Of more importance so far as Holmes's moral

teaching is concerned is the idea that there is a mental and bodily life 'independent of our volition.' He quotes Leibniz on the doctrine of 'unconscious cerebration.' Mental life is wider and deeper than our consciousness of it; 'it does not follow, that, because we do not perceive thought, it does not exist.' With the great series of vital actions 'unconscious activity is the rule.' If therefore there is mental and bodily action for which we as voluntary agents cannot be held responsible, in that it fulfils itself irrespective of our will, such action is devoid of moral quality. We shall see among other things in Holmes's teaching a scientific presentation of the doctrine of natural depravity against which in its Calvinistic form he brought all the force of his religious passion; but it is a presentation robbed of the sting of damnation, and making for charity and large-heartedness. But that his moral teaching in this specific matter is sound, or at least clear, is questionable, for at times there seems to be a confusion between the thing that is evil and the action which is sinful. At all times Holmes has been 'fond of making apologies for human nature.' He believed in the stability of the moral order and in the predominance of the good, since average experience confirmed the thought of the prevalent tendency to righteousness. He insisted on the fact of law in Nature, and when confronted

by the phenomena of freaks, protested that they too were governed by law. 'With a little management one can even manufacture living monstrosities.' He reasoned that in like fashion, 'obliquities of character are to be accounted for on perfectly natural principles,' and that therefore since the life of a man was bound up with the life of the race it was stupid to hold the mere individual responsible for the evil he might inflict on himself or on society. In his article on *Crime and Automatism*, written in 1875, he claims that criminals are simply 'moral idiots' and 'devoid of the ordinary moral instincts,' and since 'moral idiocy is the greatest calamity a man can inherit,' criminals deserve 'our deepest pity and greatest care.' He reminds us how 'the moral sense may be paralysed for the moment and its voice silenced by passion;' and in *The Autocrat* says, 'before any vice can fasten on a man, body, mind, or moral nature must be debilitated.' In *The Poet* he emphasizes the naturalistic basis of morality; and elsewhere, runs out the idea that since the body is affected by particular kinds of food, by pork for example, so it may be that both mind and character may be modified by diet, and morality be porcine or bovine in its nature. At no time is he unmindful of the shaping conditions of life, or of the heritage of evil which mingles in our possession of good. So he asks, 'Do you suppose that venerable

sinner expects to be rigorously called to account for the want of feeling he showed in those early years, when the instinct of destruction, derived from his forest-roaming ancestors, led him to acts which he now looks upon with pain and aversion ? ' He denies that we can rightly speak of 'the moral character of inherited tendencies,' and affirms that 'moral chaos began with the idea of transmissible responsibility.' So morality is essentially a personal affair, and is altogether dependent on the exercise of choice. Holmes is not quite clear as to the connexion between morality and sin. He tells us that '*no* sinner truly knows what he does,' and that sin therefore, if not itself ignorance, is the result of ignorance. But this statement, with which little fault may be found in the light of the limited knowledge of both saints and sinners, does not harmonize quite with his idea that 'sin, like disease, is a vital process.' So, in *The Poet*, in reference to sin, he says :

All those who have studied the subject from nature and not from books know perfectly well that a certain fraction of what is so called is nothing more or less than a symptom of hysteria ; that another fraction is the index of a limited degree of insanity ; that still another is the result of a congenital tendency which removes the act we sit in judgment upon from the sphere of self-determination, if not entirely, at least to such an extent that the subject of the tendency cannot be judged by any normal standard.

The apparent mistake in Holmes's reasoning

lies in his partial failure to recognize that society has no right to pass judgment on any act and condemn it as sinful save in the concurrence of the individual concerned. For if morality is conditioned by choice, sin refers to the relation of the agent to his choice and therefore to God. Society may condemn a thing as evil which, far from being sinful, may be for the agent the highest good. Sin covers only individual relations, even in those cases where a great nation may condone inhuman atrocities or lend itself to nefarious commercial dealings. For sin consists in the conscious, deliberate choice of a lower thing when the higher thing is present to the mind. And since judgments concerning the relativity of high and low vary greatly in individuals—one man's 'good' is another man's 'evil'—it is impossible for society to pass judgments of sin upon mere resultant conduct. Society may rightly condemn a thing as evil, and seek to bring the evil-doer to a sense of the social value of his conduct, but God alone can pass the judgment of sin. When our hearts consent to the thing that is evil, then by the grace of God are we visited with the sense of sin, and in that sense lies the condemnation of the Almighty. The evil thing is that which is recognized by the individual, and through him by society, as the discordant element in the music of the spheres, as the disintegrating force which makes for the

destruction of higher vital syntheses. Sin lies in our approval of the thing we know or believe to be evil. Holmes confuses evil with sin, apparently unmindful of the fact that no human being on earth is *to himself* a mere automaton. It is true, as Holmes points out, that much of our vital action is automatic, but judgments of morality are never passed on these. The criminal is regarded as an evil thing and corrected as such. Mere punitive treatment does not necessarily make for morality. As Holmes says of children so we may say of criminals: they 'may be whipped into obedience but not into virtue,' and if by virtue we understand morality the statement is true. But we may add that obedience, whether to society or to the higher law, is itself a virtue, and if therefore punishment can secure obedience it justifies itself, since at no time can morality exist save in the freedom of the soul. How far the criminal is 'more sinned against than sinning,' is God's affair and not that of society. Society is concerned with the relativity of the criminal's action to the normal good of the whole. At no time then is sin mere 'vital process,' for disease or evil is the process, in the individual approval of which consists the sin. Society by methods of education may lead the criminal to the deeper recognition of the evil thing and so to the stronger condemnation of the criminal by himself, but

never can society itself presume to pass judgments of sin. Further, Holmes in his onslaught on the idea of 'inherited responsibility' seems to minimize the fact of racial solidarity. In a moral sense we cannot be held accountable for the sin of others, and at times no one seems clearer on this point than Dr. Holmes, who at the Boston Unitarian Festival of 1877 protested against the notion of 'chattel sin' or 'sin as a transferable object.' But the fact still remains that 'the sins of the father are visited upon the children,' that we actually hold ourselves responsible for the welfare of others, that we share in the righteousness of generations, and by our judgments put ourselves into moral relations with primitive man. It would be wrong to say that Holmes was fundamentally unsound in his thought regarding evil and sin, but we may complain that at times he confused the one with the other, and so left it open for the unwise to draw vicious conclusions.

The question of moral responsibility is bound up with the subject of free-will and determinism, to which Holmes gave considerable attention. In *Urania*, written in 1846, while he speaks of 'these conscious, throbbing, agonised *machines*,' he also notes our possession of 'the sense of wrong, the death-defying will,' and goes on to say,

Trust not the teacher with his lying scroll,
Who tears the charter of thy shuddering soul ;

The God of love, who gave the breath that warms
All living dust in all its varied forms,
Asks not the tribute of a world like this
To fill the measure of His perfect bliss.
Though winged with life through all its radiant shores,
Creation flowed with unexhausted stores
Cherub and seraph had not yet enjoyed ;
For this He called thee from the quickening void !
Nor this alone ; a larger gift was thine,
A mightier purpose swelled His vast design ;
Thought,—conscience,—will,—to make them all thine own,
He rent a pillar from the eternal throne ! . . .
Think not too meanly of thy low estate ;
Thou hast a choice ; to choose is to create.

Holmes acknowledges the regulative power of the will in mind, but he also points out the conditions within which the will is mobile. In *The Autocrat* he likens the human will to ‘a drop of water, imprisoned in a crystal.’ The reality of the self-determining principle is not questioned, but the necessary limitations are indicated. ‘The fluent, self-determining power of human beings is a very strictly limited agency in the universe. The chief planes of its enclosing solid are, of course, organization, education, condition,’ where condition means social wealth or poverty. In *The Mechanism of Vital Actions* he spoke of ‘the mystery of that most intense of all realities—our relations, as responsible agents, to right and wrong,’ and goes on to say, ‘Our convictions, even without special divine illumination, reveal us to ourselves, not as machines, but as sub-

creative centers of intelligence and power.' This fact of self-determining existence indicates the assumption by Omnipotence of passive relations with his creatures. Hence 'all moral relations between man and his Maker are reciprocal, and must meet the approval of man's enlightened conscience before he can render true and heartfelt homage to the power that called him into being.' But self-determining as man may be, the question for Holmes remains, 'who determines the self which is the proximate source of the determination?' In *Mechanism in Thought and Morals* he writes :

I reject the mechanical doctrine which makes me the slave of outside influences, whether it work with the logic of Edwards, or the averages of Buckle ; whether it come in the shape of the Greek's destiny, or the Mahometan's fatalism. . . . I claim the right to eliminate all mechanical ideas which have crowded into the sphere of intelligent choice between right and wrong.

His best treatment of the subject is in his valuable essay on Jonathan Edwards, which proved not only that Edwards could write and say a good deal of foolish stuff, but that Holmes could deal with such matter in an effective and convincing fashion. The essay sums up Holmes's teaching on the subject.

He notes the fact that the will is used every waking moment of life. But many seemingly self-determined actions are mainly mechanical,

and this is apparent not only in individuals, but in communities which manifest a like reflex function. By analysis we find that the will is determined by infinitely varied conditions of the individual; 'at the bottom of all these lies the moral "personal equation" of each human being.' He mentions the fact that certain persons have little or no moral sense, and adds, 'we are getting to be predestinarians as much as Edwards or Calvin was, only instead of universal corruption of nature derived from Adam, we recognize inherited congenital tendencies—some good, some bad—for which the subject of them is in no sense responsible.' His conclusions are clear and of practical moral value.

In spite of the strongest-motive necessitarian doctrine, we do certainly have a feeling amounting to a working belief, that we are free to choose before we have made our choice. We have a sense of difficulty overcome by effort in many acts of choice. We have a feeling in retrospect, amounting to a practical belief, that we could have left undone the things that we have done, and that we could have done the things that we ought to have done and did not do, and we accuse or else excuse ourselves accordingly. . . . This instinctive *belief* in the power of moral choice in itself constitutes a powerful motive. Our thinking ourselves free is the key to our whole moral nature. . . . Make us out automata if you will, but we are automata which cannot help believing that they do their work well or ill as they choose, that they wind themselves up or let themselves run down by a power not in the weights or springs.

We cannot claim for Holmes that he has made

any solid contribution to the ever-abiding free-will discussion. The merely metaphysical aspect of the subject does not concern him. But he has clearly shown to the plain man the practical issues involved. The facts of heredity and environment are accepted, the presence of law in every phase of life is emphasized, the limitations of physical organization are definitely recognized : but as fundamental in human consciousness is the feeling of choice within limits, and because this sense of freedom remains, so morality becomes possible. The highest function of being, as he tells us in *The Autocrat*, 'involves a perpetual self-determination,' and the whole tenor of his teaching is a call to the realization and enjoyment of this higher life.

It is in the tenderer and more intimate phases of religion that Holmes makes his finest appeal. 'I have a creed,' said the Autocrat, 'none better, and none shorter. It is told in two words—the two first of the Paternoster. And when I say these words I mean them.' He was a profoundly religious man, loving all manifestations of the reverential spirit in whatever ecclesiastical communion found. In a letter written in 1871 to his old schoolfellow, Phineas Barnes, he says :

It is trust in something better and wiser than we are, whether it comes to us in the inner light which we believe is the direct gift of the infinite spirit, or takes the human aspect in the person of him who brings the Divine as it were face

to face with us ; or whether with deeper than even Christian humility we stretch our arms forth 'like an infant crying in the night,' and implore the Being who gave us life to give us even the crumbs of faith which fall from the table of the triumphant and unquestioning believer. To this, in one shape or another, we must all come,—if we have a Father, He will care for us and do what is best for us ; and if He is as good as even our earthly fathers and mothers have been, will judge us not by our poor stumbling acts and short-sighted views, and pitiable shortcomings, but in the light of his own magnanimous, forgiving, loving nature. . . . We must all soon cast anchor, if we have one, and mine is *Trust in God*.

He did not despise the phenomena of 'conversion,' although the noblest souls of his acquaintance had suffered no such experience ; but he preferred those who had been '*trained* to spirituality' to those who had been '*changed* to it,' and he thought that the standard of morality and religion was highest 'in the higher social ranks, where development is the rule.' The righteous life was the evidence of religious affection. His conception of God was furnished by his experience of human life in all its relations of love and affection. Beset with doubts as he was at times, he ever held to his faith in 'the Infinite love and pity.' He saw no place where God was not. Suffering was the mystery which baffled him, but he did not allow the fact of pain to blind him to its significance as an evidence of healing process. God must be at least 'as good as the best conscious being he makes ;' so much the

logic of creation demands. Because God understands our natures, so will there be plenteous redemption for the weak and the sinful. We *must* love the Creator, in that we love the nature revealed in the love and sympathy of the brethren. So in *Wind-clouds and Star-drifts* we have the manly statement of his creed :

we demand

To know Him first, then trust Him and then love,
When we have found Him worthy of our love,
Tried by our own poor hearts and not before ;
He must be truer than the truest friend,
He must be tenderer than a woman's love,
A father better than the best of sires ;
Kinder than she who bore us, though we sin
Oftener than did the brother we are told
We—poor ill-tempered mortals—must forgive,
Though seven times sinning threescore times and ten.

CONCLUSION

THE year 1809 saw the birth of Gladstone, Tennyson, Darwin, Edgar Allan Poe, and Abraham Lincoln. Without question, Holmes appreciated the life and work which these names recall. But so far as the literary output of Holmes himself is concerned, the influence of Darwin alone entered strongly into the purpose of his life. The thought of evolution is fundamental in the teaching of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Of his day and generation were William Cullen Bryant, George Bancroft, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Motley, Russell Lowell, and Walt Whitman ; but beyond the amenities of personal intercourse with the greater number of these, Holmes does not seem to have been influenced. He played his own game, and preserved a certain strain of originality at least in his prose writings. The pioneer movements of reform found him concerned mainly with his own affairs ; the transcendental move-

ment which in the thirties was in full swing affected him not at all; the idealism of Emerson was not in line with the practical aspirations which possessed Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose temper reveals itself in a chance phrase, 'prophesy as much as you like, but always hedge.'

Rarely in his writings does Holmes leave the solid ground of fact and experience; the empyrean offered him but cold and tenuous satisfaction; even in his imaginings he fights shy of things transcendental, and prefers to maintain a lowly flight not too far removed above the heads of his fellow-men. He appreciated highly the work of Emerson, and although here and there he allowed himself the privilege of a sly dig at his friend's ribs, he generously admitted the 'excellent common-sense,' the blameless and beautiful character and cheerful optimism of the greater man. 'He seemed like an exotic transplanted from some angelic nursery.' We are left to make our own inferences, when Holmes adds, 'he enriched the treasure-house of literature, but what was far more, he enlarged the boundaries of thought for the few that followed him and the many who never knew, and do not know to-day, what hand it was which took down their prison walls.' We doubt whether the writer thought of himself as among 'the few.' We are reminded of one of Holmes's sayings, that 'the saturation point of each mind differs from

that of every other.' Evidently Holmes's mind was not sufficiently absorbent to take in the transcendentalism of the Concord philosopher and his friends.

We shall understand our author better in the frank recognition of his limitations. When, in speaking of Carlyle's 'tirades,' he says, 'we smile at his clotted English, his "swarmery," and other picturesque expressions,' we shall remember that Holmes was constitutionally unfitted to appreciate the passionate intensity and tumultuous gospel of Carlyle, whose virile utterance is a challenge to the world to justify its manhood. We are not surprised that Holmes had but scant respect for the poetry of Walt Whitman, 'who, to be sure, cares little for the dictionary, and makes his own rules of rhythm, so far as there is any rhythm in his sentences.' Whitman embodied the new aspirations for an utter freedom of mind and body, a profound mysticism in his message provides a complement to the clear ringing, almost brutal directness of his word, the intensely democratic tone of which ran counter to the more melodic utterance of the New England aristocrats. When in *Over the Teacups* Holmes writes, 'I shrink from a lawless independence to which all the virile energy and trampling audacity of Mr. Whitman fail to reconcile me,' we find some confirmation of the criticism that much of the be-praised independence of Oliver

Wendell Holmes is but the fashion of a man whose literary exemplars are to be found among the writers of the eighteenth century, and whose thought, clean, convincing, attractive as it appears, is but a representation of a science-cleansed Calvinism ; for the 'amorphous condition' and anarchic confusion of Whitman were indicative of the new American spirit which breathed in the utterance of James Russell Lowell, gleamed in the brilliant mosaic of Emerson, moved uneasily in the writings of Thoreau, and found clear articulation in the splendid achievements of Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Parker.

To an enviable degree Oliver Wendell Holmes makes a varied appeal to the world. By some he is prized as an intimate friend who discourses on many things of life and mind, in a charmingly egotistic fashion but always in the strain of sound common-sense. By others he is remembered as a writer of witty occasional verse bubbling over with fun and dashed with tender pathos. Others again like him best in his solemn moods when, speaking of the secrets of the heart, he shows himself as a child in the kingdom of the Father.

What am I but the creature Thou hast made ?
 What have I save the blessings Thou hast lent ?
 What hope I but Thy mercy and Thy love ?
 Who but myself shall cloud my soul with fear ?
 Whose hand protect me from myself but Thine ?

Some value him for his hardihood in bringing scientific knowledge to bear on the old doctrines of orthodoxy, and in fighting the battle for liberal religion.

However partial may be our admiration of his life and writings, and whatever criticism we may bring to bear upon his thought, throughout all his work there are qualities of sincerity and kindly humour and real religious faith, which in their total appeal command our recognition of his worth as one of the most potent influences for good in American literature. He is an eminently healthy man with a wide outlook and practical ideals. He has a profound respect for culture and an intense belief in its power for righteousness.

Regarding life as a school, wherein the discipline at times is harsh, he cheerily proclaims himself as an optimist. In his article entitled *Pulpit and Pew*, he writes :

The real vital division of the religious part of our Protestant communities is into Christian optimists and Christian pessimists. The Christian optimist in his fullest development is characterized by a cheerful countenance, a voice in the major key, an undisguised enjoyment of earthly comforts, and a short confession of faith. His theory of the universe, is progress : his idea of God is that he is a Father with all the true paternal attributes, of man that he is destined to come into harmony with the key-note of divine order, of this earth that it is a training-school for a better sphere of existence. The Christian pessimist in his most typical

manifestation is apt to wear a solemn aspect, to speak, especially from the pulpit, in the minor key, to undervalue the lesser enjoyments of life, to insist on a more extended list of articles of belief. His theory of the universe recognizes this corner of it as a moral ruin ; his idea of the creator is that of a ruler whose pardoning power is subject to the veto of what is called " justice " ; his notion of man is that he is born a natural hater of God and goodness, and that his natural destiny is eternal misery. . . . The natural antagonists of the religious pessimists are the men of science, especially the evolutionists, and the poets.

Holmes by nature ranks among the opponents of pessimism ; he is a Christian optimist, gifted with the literary power whereby his optimism has become a real influence in the world. When clouds gather and the sense of spiritual solitude possesses us and we wonder whether after all God is the Lord, we hear his voice :

—Hush ! I will not doubt that He
Is better than our fears, and will not wrong
The least, the meanest of created things !

When the soul is sick of the fight with adversity, and sorrow presses, and care burdens the heart, we remember his hymn of trust and are uplifted.

O Love Divine, that stoop'st to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,
We smile at pain while Thou art near !
On Thee we fling our burdening woe,
O Love Divine, for ever dear,
Content to suffer while we know,
Living or dying, Thou art near !

And when we stand at the entrance to new life, and our spirit falters and we doubt our power to reach forth unto the things that are before, into our mind comes the final stanza of *The Chambered Nautilus*, and we are strengthened and encouraged.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll !
Leave thy low-vaulted past !
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea !

Because of these things of hope and cheer and inspiration, because of the sheer humanity which surges through all he attempted to do, we honour the memory of one of the wittiest and kindest men who ever breathed, Oliver Wendell Holmes.

THE END

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